DESIGNING THE PROCESS OF DELIVERING RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

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Abstract: The citizens' assemblies start with a learning phase, during which the issue is presented by experts and stakeholders. There are also discussions in small groups as well as questions and answers sessions. When the learning phase is completed, how to design the process of delivering final recommendations of the citizens' assembly to achieve high quality results? The experience from Gdańsk in Poland, where citizens' assemblies have been organized three times so far, is that at least two meetings of the citizens' assembly are needed for this aim. The purpose of the first meeting is to create a list of initial recommendations. The list is then sent to the experts and stakeholders for comments, and it is then published for an open consultation with the community. During the second meeting these comments are reviewed and final deliberation and voting takes place. A set of "guiding questions" can be used to facilitate the deliberation process. A Modified Borda Count can be used as a voting method when there are mutually excluding recommendations submitted, while in the case of supporting or rejecting a single recommendation a set of eight options to choose from has been created.

Introduction

The city of Gdańsk in the North of Poland has organized up to now three citizens' assemblies. The first one was initiated in 2016, after an extreme rainfall which caused flooding in some districts. The response of the city units was seen as inadequate and I have approached the mayor of Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz, with the idea of organizing a citizens' assembly to look at the issue of how to prepare the city better for the torrential rains that may appear in the future due to climate change. The mayor agreed and he also accepted the proposal that the recommendations of the citizens' assembly will be treated as binding for him if they reach the support of at least 80 percent of the members of the citizens' assembly. This aspect was ground-breaking as it meant that the whole process will not be just public consultations, but a deliberative democracy in action.

There are some experiences with deliberative processes in Poland, such as the deliberative poll in the city of Poznań or the citizens' jury in the same city, but they did not have binding results. In Gdańsk some of the recommendations from the first citizens' assembly have already been put into practice and when there was an event of heavy rain this summer the municipality was better prepared to respond, which could be the effect of the citizens' assembly, as one of the questions posed to it was related to reacting after the flooding event.

A couple of months later, in spring 2017, a second citizens' assembly was organized on the issue of reducing air pollution. This topic was present in the Polish media throughout the winter and even though the air quality in Gdańsk is much better than in other cities in Poland, the mayor decided to focus on it. The result was a list of 9 concrete recommendations, including a ban on burning coal in home furnaces within 5 years. Support for poor households where coal is currently burned was also recommended.

The citizens' assemblies in Gdańsk are rather short in comparison to other countries – the meetings are organized on consecutive Saturdays. During the first two citizens' assemblies the additional time on Sundays turned out to be necessary. Nevertheless, the citizens' assembly on air quality took just three weekends to complete. One reason for the short time for the citizens' assemblies was political – the aim was to complete the first one by the end of the year, to bring concrete results and to show that it works. The second reason was that the process of citizens' assemblies was new in Gdańsk and there was no certainty that people will apply to take part in it. Eventually they did – the response rate for the invitations was around 10 percent. In the end all of this resulted in a very efficient way of organizing citizens' assemblies that can be adapted and replicated in other cities around the world.

The main topic of the third citizens' assembly was how to improve civic engagement, with an additional topic on just one day on how to support equal treatment of men and women and LGBT persons. Five meetings were planned, but its scope of the issues presented turned out to be so large that the members of the citizens' assembly decided to meet on a sixth Saturday. As the coordinators, we deliberately wanted to prolong the whole process to provide time for digesting the knowledge that was to be presented during the educational phase. Especially taking into consideration that the third educational day was to deal with the issue of equal treatment of LGBT persons which is an issue that many people in Poland do not feel very comfortable with. Since there was some extra time between the meetings we organized an additional workshop on mindfulness and communication skills, only for those who are interested in taking part in it. The first 3 days constituted the educational phase and 2 last days were designated for developing recommendations.

Overview of the model from Gdańsk

One of the basic premises of the model from Gdańsk is that democracy should be about bringing the best out of people. It should be also efficient and provide well-thought-out, informed decisions for the common good. This is the background for designing the process of convening the citizens' assembly in Gdańsk. On a personal note, the reason why I became interested in democracy was to improve the political decision-making processes in the face of climate change, loss of wildlife and other global challenges. I also agree with Frances Moore Lappé, author of "Diet for a Small Planet", that hunger in the world is not caused by lack of food, but by the lack of real democracy. So, from the very start the model developed in

Gdańsk was also created as something that can be used in other cities and countries around the world.

From a legal perspective, citizens' assemblies in Gdańsk are organized by the mayor. In practice, however, they are organized by a team of 3 independent coordinators in cooperation with a municipality. We have created the following minimum standards to ensure integrity of the citizens' assemblies for use in Poland:
    a) random selection of participants,
    b) demographic (descriptive) representation,
    c) invitation of all stakeholders,
    d) independent organization of the process and facilitation,
    e) inclusion of deliberation,
    f) impact on real-life decisions (a binding effect of recommendations),
    g) monitoring of how the recommendations are implemented.

Coordinators are designated by the mayor – in practice the mayor can choose the main coordinator who later on invites other members of the team. The role of the coordinators is to create the programme, to invite experts and stakeholders, to select facilitators and in general to take care of the whole process. From our experience in Gdańsk the cooperation with the municipality, instead of outsourcing everything (which is also possible), is a solution that works. It allows to lower the costs of organizing the event and it provides the municipality a regular insight into the preparations, which helps to build trust.

In the mixed model a clear division of roles and responsibilities is needed. The best option that emerged so far from our experience in Gdańsk is to have 3 independent coordinators with equal say in creating the programme and 2 people from the municipality supporting them in organizational matters, as required. A team of 3 coordinators makes all decisions by consensus, which is the first of the checks in the process of creating the programme. What is important is that from the very beginning the programme is created in cooperation with the stakeholders who are asked to provide their opinions with regards to which specific topics should be covered and which experts and other stakeholders should be invited.

Monitoring of the work of the coordinators should be ensured, especially in relation to being in accordance with the standards of organizing citizens' assemblies. What is an advisable solution here is to have a large monitoring group with representatives of the municipality, NGOs and other institutions and informal groups. The monitoring group would have the power to demand a change in the programme if the standards were violated by the coordinators. Furthermore, with regards to the specific points in the programme the following mechanism of verifying the programme can be used – if at least 25% of members of the monitoring team would like to verify an expert or recommend that a specific theme be covered in the programme a group of 3 experts from at least 10 universities would be randomly selected. The assumption is that they need to have at least a PhD degree and work in the faculty closely related to the topic in question. They would have the power to replace an

expert or to modify the programme in other ways, if they agreed to do so unanimously. If there is no consensus, then their opinions are treated as auxiliary. A similar mechanism for verification was created for the third citizens' assembly in Gdańsk, however, it was not initiated.

What is also worth noting is that the citizens' assembly itself has the possibility to invite an expert of their choice – each member of the citizens' assembly can propose an expert and if the assembly votes in favor with a simple majority then he or she is invited to the meeting by the coordinators.

The list of the stakeholders is not edited by the coordinators. The assumption is that whichever group would like to present their point of view or their solutions, it is granted an equal time to do so. It must be a group though. Due to the limited time, stakeholders may be encouraged by the coordinators to create group statements, nevertheless, it is a decision of stakeholders if they agree to do so.

When organizing a third citizens' assembly in Gdańsk the following issue turned out – since one of the subjects to be discussed is education, shouldn't the students be invited directly as stakeholders? The answer was obviously – yes, but then the next question appears: who do you actually invite and speak with? The Students City Council? As a team of coordinators, we have decided that we should organize "students' assemblies" for junior high students and secondary schools students with a group selected by lot. A special methodology was devised for this purpose – 5 schools were randomly selected for each age group, and then from these schools students were selected by lot. We have organized a workshop for them to discuss the issue of civic engagement and to ask what they need to support it in schools.

Individual citizens also can present their opinions, however, due to time constraints, they can do so in writing only. There is an open consultations phase of the process organized each time, when opinions of individual citizens are gathered.

The size of the third citizens' assembly in Gdańsk was set to 56 members plus 8 substitutes. The assumption made was that the assembly should be larger than the city council (it currently has 34 members) and at the same time not too big to ensure high quality deliberation. This pointed to the number of around 60 people. The final number of 56 members of the citizens' assembly is related to the number and size of the districts of Gdańsk. Some of them have less than 10 000 citizens and then they have only 1 representative in the assembly. For each 10 000 residents there is one additional representative, so for example the largest district of Gdańsk – *Chełm* – has 4 representatives. The number of 10 000 was selected to allow to create the size of the group within the range of 60 people.

We use the voters' register to randomly select the participants who receive letters with the invitation. In Poland people are added to the voters' register almost automatically, so if a person declares that he or she lives in Gdańsk, this person is added to the register. The ideal

composition of the group is created to match 4 demographic criteria – gender, age group, district and education level. The first three criteria are easily available from the voters' register. The education level is less exact and we use data from the national survey which is a couple of years old to determine the number of people with primary, middle and higher education levels.

An ideal composition of the third citizens' assembly in Gdańsk is:

Profile:		Structure:	Number of members of the citizens' assembly - 56	Number of substitutes – 8
Gender	**Age**			
Woman	18-24	3,4%	2	1
Woman	25-39	14,3%	8	1
Woman	40-64	21,2%	12	1
Woman	65+	15,5%	9	1
Man	18-24	3,4%	2	1
Man	25-39	13,4%	7	1
Man	40-64	18,6%	10	1
Man	65+	10,3%	6	1
	Total		**56**	**8**
Education level				
Group 1 – primary education, junior high, without formal education		12,8%	7	1
Group 2 – secondary school, vocational school		57,1%	32	5
Group 3 – university, college		30,1%	17	2
	Total		**56**	**8**

The next step is to create individual demographic profiles of all 56 members of the citizens' assembly. An individual profile at this stage is for example – district: *Nowy Port*, gender: woman, age: 25-39 years old (education level is added later). Individual profiles are created using random selection. We use for it the website *Random.org* and a specially created computer software that supports the sortition process. A voters' register is uploaded to it along with the list of demographic profiles. The result is a list of addresses and identification codes to be printed. Letters of invitation are sent only to people from the voters' registry who fulfill the selected demographic criteria – this is known from the data from the voters' register. Thanks to this whenever someone registers to take part in the citizens' assembly he or she is
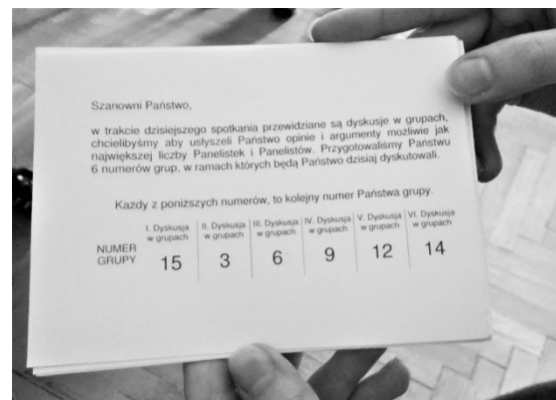
already in the "appropriate" demographic group, so it is easier to obtain an ideal demographic composition of the assembly.

More than 100 letters are sent for each demographic profile, proportionally to the number of people who live in each district. Only citizens who received a letter of invitation can register to take part in the citizens' assembly. They can register on the website of the citizens' assembly or by phone. A special identification code is included in the letter and is required for registration. Members of the citizens' assembly are paid a fee of 600 PLN for taking part in it (at current exchange rate it is 140 Euro). This is an encouragement for participation of people who otherwise would be less interested in public affairs. It allows also to cover for example the costs of travel or child care and it indicates that the process is treated seriously by the municipality.

A simple dice is used for final random selection. It was concluded that it is more transparent and trustworthy to toss a dice rather than to use electronic sortition. The whole sortition process with a dice is transmitted live on the internet on the website of Gdańsk (www.gdansk.pl/panel-obywatelski). A special software has been written to support the final random selection that is called *Panel helper* (the word "panel" in Polish is used for the English "assembly") and it is available for a free download and further modifications as an open source software. *Panel helper* allows users to search the database of people who registered to take part in the citizens' assembly according to the given demographic criteria. If there are more than 6 people within the certain demographic profile, there is a possibility of shortening the list to 6 – the programme connects with the website Random.org and selects 6 numbers. This is done with just one click.

Time during educational days is divided into expert and stakeholders presentations. Experts have from 12 to 20 minutes for speeches. A usual block consists of two 12-minutes presentations delivered by experts, and these are followed by a 10-minutes deliberation in small groups and then there are 10 minutes reserved for questions and answers to the speakers.

Discussions in small groups are carried out in groups of 4 people. Tables were not used so far. There are numbers attached to the backs of chairs that form "nests" of 4 chairs. Members of the citizens assembly are given sheets of paper with numbers of nests for discussions in small groups. There is a special algorithm prepared to ensure maximum diversity in groups, so that people can listen to many different voices and opinions. It also allows members of the citizens' assembly to get to know each other as a whole group. This way of working in small groups was inspired by the World Café method. We didn't have appropriate tables though, so the

concept of nests was created. Discussions in all groups are facilitated by the members of the citizens' assembly themselves.

The amount of time given to the stakeholders depends on their number. As a general rule, the time is divided equally among the stakeholders and the order of presentations is selected by lot, using the website Random.org. There is also time available for questions, however, there are no discussions in small groups at this stage. All stakeholders and experts can hand out to the members of the citizens' assembly additional resources or statements in writing.

Presentations given by experts and stakeholders as well as question-and-answers sessions are transmitted live on the internet on the website of the municipality. They are also recorded and available for reviewing. Since the time for the presentation of experts is limited, some may be asked for a recording of their speech or a short text with their recommendations. What's more, members of the citizens' assembly can ask experts or stakeholders additional questions (through coordinators).

Delivering the recommendations

It is the experience from Gdańsk, so far, that at least two days should be reserved for delivering the recommendations. If the scope of the issue is vast, it may take longer, as it has already happened in Gdańsk during the third citizens' assembly - it took three meetings on Saturdays and an editorial meeting on a Thursday which started around 6 PM and ended after 10:30 PM.
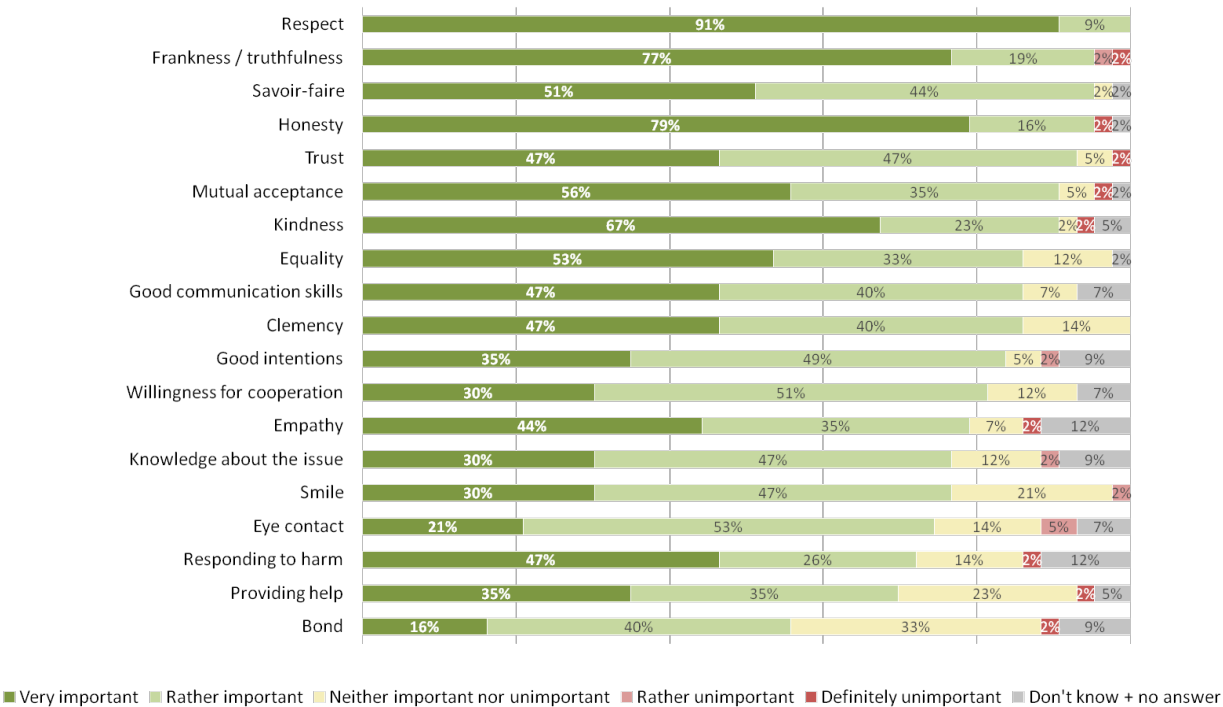
The aim of the first meeting, at this stage, is to propose initial recommendations. Then there is a time for gathering comments from experts, stakeholders and the community in the open consultations. The aim of the second meeting, which may take place for example two weeks later, is to deliberate upon the proposed recommendations, to make final amendments and to vote.

DAY 1

During the first day the following steps can be made to prepare the initial versions of the recommendations:

1) Clarifying the common good – it is emphasized in Gdańsk that the aim of the citizens' assembly is to find best solutions for the common good. But what does "the common good" actually mean? What are the values of the citizens which constitute the common good? Before proposing concrete solutions, it is useful to clarify this point and possibly to discuss what is the common vision of the city's future, depending on the subject posed to the assembly. Since the third citizens' assembly was dealing with the topics related to social issues, such as civic engagement and equality, the group was asked: "What is important for you in human relationships?" to the determine common good. The question was discussed at first in small

groups and then answers were gathered on a flipchart. After completion, a survey was prepared to check the position of the whole group. The results are as follows:

	Very important	Rather important	Neither important nor unimportant	Rather unimportant	Definitely unimportant	Don't know + no answer
Respect	91%	9%				
Frankness / truthfulness	77%	19%		2%	2%	
Savoir-faire	51%	44%		2%	2%	
Honesty	79%	16%		2%	2%	
Trust	47%	47%		5%	2%	
Mutual acceptance	56%	35%		5%	2%	2%
Kindness	67%	23%		2%	2%	5%
Equality	53%	33%	12%			2%
Good communication skills	47%	40%	7%			7%
Clemency	47%	40%	14%			
Good intentions	35%	49%	5%	2%		9%
Willingness for cooperation	30%	51%	12%			7%
Empathy	44%	35%	7%	2%		12%
Knowledge about the issue	30%	47%	12%	2%		9%
Smile	30%	47%	21%			2%
Eye contact	21%	53%	14%	5%		7%
Responding to harm	47%	26%	14%	2%		12%
Providing help	35%	35%	23%		2%	5%
Bond	16%	40%	33%		2%	9%

■ Very important ■ Rather important ■ Neither important nor unimportant ■ Rather unimportant ■ Definitely unimportant ■ Don't know + no answer

During the second citizens' assembly on air quality a different approach was taken. At first members of the citizens' assembly discussed briefly in pairs what are the values that are important in their lives (a speed dialogue could be used here as well). Next, they were asked to write down, as a whole group, on the large sheets of paper, what is important for them with regards to human relationships, values and environment.

A simple voting method can be also used to check which values are shared by most people – make 2 lines next to the value which is very important to you and make 1 line next to the value which you find important. There are several variations of this method – there can be 3 preferential votes to be made or a member of the citizens' assembly may be able to mark as many values as he or she wishes. The advantage of this method is that it is possible to quickly count the votes.

2) Reviewing importance of the issue – if the issue presented to the citizens' assembly was complex, it may be useful to look at it again at this stage. During the citizens' assembly on air quality members were presented data from measurement stations to determine how significant was the level of air pollution. Most people who spoke after the discussion in small groups said that the problem was serious.

3) Reviewing proposals of experts and stakeholders – there are many presentations during the meetings of the citizens' assembly and many solutions are proposed. To make it easy for the

members of the citizens' assembly, a booklet with summaries of presentations, with key findings, conclusions and solutions is prepared. Sufficient time is needed to read it all on-site.

4) Initial discussion – after reading the booklet with proposals it is useful to start a discussion in small groups about the possible solutions that could become recommendations of the citizens' assembly. There can be several rounds of such discussions at this point.

5) Brainstorming proposals for recommendations – having discussed it in small groups a list of proposals is gathered on the flipcharts. At this stage they are not judged, it's just writing them down. A single person can propose a recommendation, and there is no limit to their number.

6) First analysis – the initial proposals for recommendation can be transferred from flipcharts to a Power Point for easier editing and in a larger group it is easier to read them from the back of the room. The following questions can be asked when discussing each proposal:

- is the recommendation an answer to the question posed to the citizens' assembly?
- is the recommendation clear and understandable?
- are there at least 5 people who support it?

The first questions may turn out to be a cause of a heated debate. If the citizens' assembly decides that the proposed recommendation is not the answer to the question posed to the assembly then the proposal is deleted and abandoned. In Gdańsk it is checked by voting – a show of hands with a simple majority is sufficient to make a decision. At this stage the proposals may be also combined or edited for clarity. The reason to check the support of at least 5 people for the recommendation is to make sure that the proposal has some support in the rest of the group before being presented to the public for open consultations.

7) Stylistic review – at the end of the day it is useful to check the wording of the initial recommendations to see whether it is all written down properly. The versions after the stylistic review should be checked with the whole group to make sure that the meaning of the recommendations is unchanged.

BETWEEN THE MEETINGS

8) Gathering final comments from experts, stakeholders and citizens – this part is crucial to ensure high-quality decisions of the citizens' assembly. To a large extent members of the citizens' assembly depend on the input from experts, so it is important to provide them with expert comments on their recommendations. It is the role of the experts to point to advantages or disadvantages of particular solutions that were initially presented. Furthermore, during the third citizens' assembly in Gdańsk the initial versions of the recommendations were published

on the municipality's website and anyone who was interested in the issue could send a comment. Thanks to this the community was also involved in the process at this stage.

A special set of questions was prepared for the municipality. Apart from comments on whether the initial recommendations are fine from their perspective, they were asked to answer the following questions with regards to each proposed recommendation:
- is it legal?
- whose responsibility is it to implement it?
- what are of the estimate costs?

This part may take 2-4 weeks depending on complexity of the subject and the number of recommendations. It may be useful to make two rounds of comments – experts can also comment on each other's opinions. It may turn out to be very important, because, for example, one expert may claim that something is not going to work or that it is illegal, then another expert will be able respond to it and to provide the citizens' assembly with counterarguments. It is also helpful to ask experts to suggest new versions of the recommendations and to show what are the possible variations.

The amount of materials gathered at this stage may be enormous. In Gdańsk comments were sent via email to the members of the citizens' assembly on regular basis, and in the end they were compiled and printed.

DAY 2

9) Reviewing comments from experts and stakeholders – the final day may start with an introduction and then a time set aside for reading the comments sent by experts, stakeholders and members of the community. This part is important as not everyone may have had a chance to read it before the meeting. Comments may be then discussed in small groups to learn what drew attention of other members of the citizens' assembly.

10) Creating a cost-benefit matrix - a useful tool that may be introduced as a starter for deliberation is a cost-benefit matrix. It may be created by the whole group. For example, four flipcharts can be used for this aim to note down the following: a) benefits of change, b) costs of not changing, c) benefits of not changing (payoffs of status quo), d) costs of change. The cost-benefit matrix may help the group to deepen the understanding of how far the changes should reach and what may be the results of their decisions.

10) Final deliberation - this is the heart of the citizens' assembly. Final deliberation is carried out as a whole group discussion, with several questions that may be asked for each proposed recommendation:

- what are its strengths and weaknesses?
- do you feel resistance for this recommendation?
- what are my or our needs behind the recommendation?

There is also time for open comments. Two facilitators are needed to run it.

Checking resistance is a good starting point for a discussion – it is possible to see pretty quickly which recommendation is controversial. It can be done by raising hand – two hands for strong resistance, one hand for some resistance, and no hand raised when no resistance is felt.

Discussing the needs behind recommendations helps to deepen understanding of the citizens' assembly as to why someone proposed a particular recommendation. To prepare the group for a discussion about needs, a printed list of basic human needs (like the one used in Non-Violent Communication) may be handed out.

All recommendations can be discussed, one by one, in this manner. It helps the citizens' assembly to understand implications of supporting them and different perspectives can be also presented.

11) Voting – there are two methods of voting used in Gdańsk to check the support for recommendations. If there is more than one option submitted for the same issue - there are mutually excluding options, a preferential voting method is used and votes are counted using Modified Borda Count. For counting the votes a facilitation software is used, developed by The de Borda Institute, called "Decision-Maker". Consensus coefficient is checked to see if there is required level of support. Consensus coefficient is defined by Peter Emerson, director of The de Borda Institute, as option's MBC score divided by the maximum possible score. It can be converted to percentage.

When there is a single proposal for recommendation, there are currently eight options available to choose from: 1) I strongly agree, 2) I agree, 3) I agree, however, I have some doubts or reservations, 4) I have many doubts, 5) I rather disagree, 6) I disagree, 7) I strongly disagree, 8) To be rejected for other reasons. "Agree" options (1-3) are then summed up to check support. The eighth option has been introduced for the cases when the recommendation is something that the member of the citizens' assembly agrees on, but it is a project for example already being implemented. The aim of this voting method is to allow members of the citizens' assembly to vote honestly and to allow them to state their position precisely. A good practice is to announce the results right after counting of the votes has been completed.