

# CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES

*Guide to democracy  
that works*



MARCIN GERWIN

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Kraków

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Open Plan Foundation is a non-governmental organization with the aim of working for the environmental protection, ecological and global education, green economy, sustainable transportation, renewable energy and development of civil society. Our particular interest lies in the popularisation and implementation of a concept of a sustainable city which is understood as being friendly to people and nature. We prepare educational campaigns, workshops and training sessions for children, young people and adults.

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## Introduction

I admit that I didn't expect that one day I would become involved in improving democracy. Despite the fact that I had studied political science, what interested me after I graduated was nature conservation. I also thought about becoming a veterinarian. When one reads books by James Herriot who treated animals in the English countryside, then that's what may happen. My interest in democracy originated from wondering how to implement sustainability. It turned out that, although it's been long known what a good life in harmony with nature looks like, and that there are appropriate, environmentally-friendly technologies and legal solutions supporting sustainable development, the changes occur very slowly. How is that possible?

But first, what is sustainable development? From my perspective, it is a way to achieve a good quality of life, which in practical terms means that people are happy. At the same time, it involves people caring for the preservation of abundance of nature, wealth of natural resources and social equality which is understood as a creation of conditions in which all people will be able to achieve that good quality of life.

The support of sustainable development today is important because there are places in the world where forests disappear, where soil is degraded, or water is polluted with chemicals. A significant portion of society lives in poverty and the cities sprawl into farmlands. What causes the solutions to these challenges to get stuck somewhere and not be accepted as rapidly as they could be? When one takes a closer look, it turns out that, among other things, the mode of functioning of contemporary

democracies is not conducive to thinking of solutions over a longer perspective. The basis of contemporary democracies is the elections, which usually entail competition and concern of the interest of political groups. And that does not always translate into concern for of the people and nature.

A mode of design of a political system influences the behaviour of people functioning within its bounds. This system may encourage cooperation or generate conflicts. Let's start by looking at the voting methods – although it may seem that this is a trifle, it may affect the atmosphere in the parliament and the politicians' behaviour. As they may behave differently if a simple majority of 50% plus one vote is sufficient to make a decision (as is the case now in the Polish Sejm), and differently when decisions are made in the preferential voting where one indicates options according to one's preferences and the required level of support for the adoption of a law would be higher than the current simple majority.

The way preferential voting works is that the option we consider to be the best we mark with "1", the option we like the second-best, we mark with "2", then "3", "4", etc. instead of marking just one "x". It might seem a small change, however, it allows to achieve a more precise voting result, and, moreover, it is conducive to a search for a consensus. It encourages to look for support for one's proposals outside one's group, since in this voting method one can vote for a number of proposals at the same time. Then, granting of the second or even the third preference increases the chances for the bill to be passed. This makes it worthwhile to search for allies which, in turn, affects interpersonal relations.

In so far as the elections are important to parliamentarians or mayors, the priorities of the common people are usually different. They may look at the proposals for political solutions and wonder what will be favourable for them in both

the short as well as long-term, without burdening themselves with the calculations of the election results. They may take into consideration what will be good for their children, or even grandchildren, for the future of the community they live in. It is crucial for them whether the city or the country functions well, whether the relations among people are good, whether the people are united, whether they treat one another with respect and help one another, whether the place they live in enables them contact with nature and, generally speaking, a good quality of life. They want to be happy.

Hence a question emerges – what will a democratic system which is capable of achieving this look like and how will it function? How will a democracy work which enables decision-making with full regard to the well-being of people and nature, taking into consideration long-term effects? A greater engagement of residents and citizens in decision-making is certainly needed. But how does one actually do it?

It has taken me a few years to realize the value of the citizens' assemblies. At the beginning, I was involved in promoting participatory budgeting by which residents themselves decide on the expenditures from a portion of the city's budget (or have an influence on the whole). Sopot became the first city in Poland in which it was implemented. It was very important to me that all stakeholders could participate in it, as well as that the city's development be discussed. The fundamental elements of the participatory budget, as I saw it, were the meetings of residents. They were meant to create an opportunity to deliberate on the direction of the city's development, to ponder over the expenditure priorities, as well as to select the best projects only after they were discussed (it is a different formula than the one commonly utilized in Poland nowadays).



And here another issue appears – who will participate in those meetings? What will be the composition of such a group? It is important since the group's composition affects the result of the vote. Will we be able to consider this group to be representative or rather will they mostly be the persons who are already interested in the topic and have time to take part in the meetings? Additionally, one cannot exclude a risk that a special group of people will be “invited” to the meeting only to affect the results of the vote. That aspect should not be overlooked.

Eventually I had to conclude that the idea of open meetings had its significant flaws. Whereas in small communities it might still work, in large cities or at the entire country level it would be impractical. It also turned out that the referenda which in Poland may be organised both at city and national level, have

their weak spots. Despite the fact that everyone can take part in them, which is undoubtedly their advantage, they do not provide a sufficient opportunity to familiarize oneself with the topic – the educational aspect is limited. Even if educational materials are provided, meaningful discussion is still lacking in case of referenda. And the quality of decision-making requires both learning and deliberation.

All of the above led me to a conclusion that the most favourable solution would be simply to select by lot a representative group which would have a fixed and clearly defined composition, for which educational programme would be prepared with the presentations by experts, NGOs and so forth. And these are the principles of the citizens' assemblies and deliberative democracy – a democracy the basis of which is deliberation and consideration of a given issue from different sides.

Nevertheless, some time had to pass before the first city-level assembly with binding results was organised. Initially, a citizens' assembly was organised in Gdańsk by a non-governmental organization, in which I took part as a coordinator which I took part as a coordinator. The municipal office did not decide to participate in this one. It was, nonetheless, an opportunity to gain experience for the future. The first computer programme for supporting random selection was created at that time. A direct inspiration for how to design the process of the citizens' assembly in Gdańsk was the work of the newDemocracy Foundation from Australia. We have also organised a workshop promoting citizens' assemblies in Warsaw during which Lyn Carson from the newDemocracy Foundation talked via Skype about her approach and experiences.

And then there came a flood in Gdańsk. The municipal office had been preparing for severe weather events with torrential

rain for more than ten years. However, in 2016 when it started to rain, a part of Gdańsk was once again flooded. I then read a commentary by a municipal official that no one designs for such high volume of rainfall, meaning no one builds that large retention ponds or storm drain systems. “How is it possible?” – I thought. Did no one take into consideration the fact that the climate was changing, and that one of its results could be more extreme rainfall in our region? I delved into this topic and wrote an article about it. The conclusion from a Facebook discussion after that text was published was that if Gdańsk was to be really well prepared for extreme rainfalls, then it would be worthwhile to engage the residents, since this would enable the city to do more than so far. That served as an impulse to email the mayor of Gdańsk and propose a meeting and the organization of the citizens’ assembly on this topic.

Soon afterwards, a response came from the municipal office and together with Łukasz Pancewicz, a city planner, we went to a meeting with the mayor of Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz. The mayor agreed to the organization of the citizens’ assembly at the very beginning of the meeting. There remained, however, one key question – the results of the assembly should be binding, because only in this way would the entire process be taken seriously and it would increase the involvement of all participants, from the members of the citizens’ assembly, through to the experts and city officials. The mayor only pondered that perhaps two seconds after which he accepted the premise that the results of the assembly would be binding upon him if the support of the members of the citizens’ assembly for the recommendation was at least 80%. Consequently, the citizens’ assembly in Gdańsk was not merely a public consultation but deliberative democracy in action. That is how it all started. The first assembly was organised in

Gdańsk, then the second one, the third, and then inspired by those experiences the city of Lublin made a decision to organise a citizens' assembly with a purpose of improving air quality.

Each citizens' assembly serves as an opportunity to perfect methodology, from deliberation and integration to the improvement of the random selection software. Even though after each software update it seemed that it was it and that the next improvement would not be necessary, then we conducted another random selection and it turned out that some things still could be done better.



The detailed process of organising citizens' assemblies is still very open and one can expect that in the future some new solutions will appear. However, its basic premises have crystal-

ized – a group of members of the citizens’ assembly should be randomly selected and should be demographically representative, independent coordinators are responsible for the organization, they make up the agenda, presentation of all perspectives is made possible, good conditions for deliberation and the assembly’s recommendations affect the decisions being made. That final aspect could one day be codified and the results of the assembly will then be binding on a par with the results of voting in a referendum. It will be a great step forward in the improvement of democracy.

On the other hand, the very organization of an assembly is a pleasure. It is, in fact, a celebration of democracy, an opportunity to explore a specific topic, to meet with residents and to be creative. Experiences from many countries all over the world – from Poland, Canada, Australia, the United States, Germany, Austria, Ireland or Belgium show that this form of democracy works in practice. Therefore, I hope that this guide will be useful for the organization of assemblies both at the city level as well as at the country level and that it will bring lots of joy to everyone, that it will be an opportunity to meet people and do something good for local communities and for our planet.

Last but not least, one small secret – how does one make a citizens’ assembly work? The starting point is an inner conviction that people are inherently good and that they are capable of making wise decisions.

Marcin Gerwin  
*Sopot, 2018*



## 1. Democracy that works

Imagine a group of people of different ages who meet in order to settle some matter important for a city, a country or for the European Union. This group was not selected through elections but by lot. It was done in such a way that its structure reflects basic demographic characteristics of a given city or country. People's age, gender, place of residence and education level were taken into consideration. In the country-level citizens' assembly it is worthwhile to consider the division into the city and the village. Thus one obtains a city or a country in miniature.

Such a group does not have to be big. It may include 50 or 100 persons. It can be larger when the topic of the assembly is, e.g., changes in the constitution. Its size depends on the size of the city or the country, as well as on the organizational capabilities. It is crucial that the group be considered representative; it should inspire trust and take into consideration a variety of perspectives and life experiences.

That group will for the following days listen to presentations by experts, representatives of authorities, NGOs and other groups with an interest or expertise in the topic. They will read expert analyses and comments sent by other residents who were not selected to the assembly by lot. Their role is to study a given topic in depth and consider which solutions will be most favourable from the perspective of the common good.

The best name for this group in English, in my opinion, is a citizens' assembly. In Poland we use the name "panel obywatelski" – a citizens' panel, which is also fine. Citizens' assemblies, in different forms and under different names, were

organized, among other places, in Australia, Canada, Ireland and USA. They can be organized on almost any topic. The principal limitation here is the time which is needed for the learning phase and for familiarizing oneself with the information necessary to make an informed decision. A short citizens' assembly can be spread over four Saturdays – two days for the learning phase and two days for deliberation – if the matter is simple, however, if need be, there can be a dozen meetings and the entire assembly may be spread over even two years. It all depends on a topic. This method is, by principle, defined as a long-term deliberation.

What good does it do? First of all, it provides an opportunity for a high quality of decisions. Members of the citizens' assembly are selected by lot instead of being selected in elections or indicated by someone, thanks to which they can be independent in their judgements. In Poland both the group who will receive the invitations as well as the final group are selected by lot. Only the persons who received the invitation may join the assembly. Due to the fact that there are no elections, there is no political competition among the members of the citizens' assembly – thinking of running the election campaign is completely redundant. One can then focus on the issue the assembly is dealing with and there is no need to worry that if someone changes their mind, then they will not be selected for the assembly again, they will lose their position in their party or in the eyes of their voters. Psychological mechanisms regarding elections do not occur during the assembly at all – there exists nothing here which could cause them. Deliberative democracy simply works in a different way.

Before making a decision, the members of the citizens' assembly familiarise themselves in detail with a given topic. They gain knowledge they might not have had before the commencement

of the assembly. The premise is that during the learning phase experts present the possibly broadest spectrum of perspectives and solutions in a given matter. Next, in the part of stakeholders' presentations, the representatives of NGOs or institutions are invited to present their positions under the same principles – they enjoy the same time slot for a presentation and their order is selected by lot. The aim is to provide equal opportunities to present different options. Every organization may also send any number of additional educational materials. One councillor from the city of Łódź noted after observing the citizens' assembly in Gdańsk, as a councillor she did not receive such an extensive range of information before making a decision.

The mere fact that the fullest possible spectrum of potential solutions is presented enables the quality of decisions made by the assembly to be potentially higher than if there was no assembly. When a citizens' assembly is organised, experts can be invited who would be disregarded during the standard procedure of decision-making by the municipal office or the government. And it is their proposals which could gain the greatest support of the members of the citizens' assembly and become the most favourable from the perspective of the common good.

Members of the citizens' assembly think of what will be the most beneficial for them as residents, not from the perspective of the next elections but their entire lives, as well as lives of their children and grandchildren. Such was the attitude of the members of the citizens' assembly in Gdańsk when they were making a decision regarding what to do to improve the air quality in the city. They were thinking in the long-term perspective, not only about themselves, but also about their children. Hence, they decided to adopt very definitive solutions regarding the improvement of air quality, i.e. a total ban on burning coal in

household furnaces. They did not have to wonder what would the director of the department or the mayor would say, whether they would gain or lose in the voters' eyes. They are the voters and they are the ones who employ the director of the department or the mayor. They make decisions from the position of supreme authority which in democracy are ordinary people. In Poland, this supreme authority of the society (the people) is guaranteed to us in the constitution in article 4.

What is equally crucial when organising a citizens' assembly is to create a positive atmosphere which is conducive to favourable conditions for a conversation and an in-depth consideration of which solutions are the best. At the same time, the transparency of the process is guaranteed – the presentations of experts and stakeholders in the learning phase are transmitted live online and recorded, so it is known who proposes what. In turn, the aspect of universality is guaranteed in such a way that all interested residents may send their comments and remarks to the members of the citizens' assembly.





## 2. Preparation before the citizens' assembly

It is ideal when the recommendations of the citizens' assembly in a given matter are treated as binding and are implemented. A decision to that effect should therefore be made at the very beginning by the mayor or the councillors. The citizens' assembly may be conducted as public consultations – it will then be a poll on people's expectations in that regard. However, the involvement of members of the citizens' assembly, experts, the municipal office and the organizations will be greater if it is known from the start that whatever is agreed, will be implemented.

For a binding effect of the decisions made by the citizens' assembly, it is not necessary to change the law, it can be done informally. A declaration of the mayor or the city council that the assembly's decision will be respected is sufficient. The participatory budgeting has worked under such principles in Poland for many years. Obviously, a change of law would be ideal and if such opportunity arises, it should be done. Nonetheless, one can start with a declaration.

In Gdańsk, it was agreed that the recommendations which gained the support of the members of the citizens' assembly at 80% will be deemed binding. If the support for a given proposal is lower, then it is treated as a suggestion which the mayor may but does not have to take into consideration. The level of 80% was agreed as almost a complete consensus – a supermajority – it is something that the group of residents considers to be obvious. Such a high threshold of support gives comfort that it will not be an accidental thing but the support for a given proposal will be very high indeed.

If in a given city the rules of public consultation are already adopted (in Poland they are adopted by the city council), then the citizens' assembly should be listed as one of the forms of public consultations.

While organising the first citizens' assembly at the city level, one might consider also organising workshops for the city officials and NGOs (separately), presenting to them how it functions, dispelling any doubts and thus creating a positive atmosphere around the citizens' assembly. An ideal approach on the part of the municipal office is the following: "Dear residents, we would like to find out what your needs and expectations are in this matter. So far, we have been doing this and that, perhaps, however, you would need something more or something different? We are open to your recommendations since our role is to act for your good." Then, it will work.

It should be noted at the very beginning that the recommendations of the citizens' assembly may vary from the results of public polls or open public consultations. The reason for this is that the members of the citizens' assembly make a decision based on the gained knowledge and deliberation. Their position in a given matter may significantly differ at the end from the one at the beginning of the assembly. This is evident in the research done on numerous occasions by James Fishkin who organised deliberative polling. For example, in 2011 the participants of the deliberative poll in South Korea thought at the beginning that the continuation of humanitarian aid for North Korea, regardless of the threat of nuclear weapon, is not necessary (43%), after the deliberation, however, they changed their mind and 78% of the members of the citizens' assembly were in favour of the continuation of the aid. Thus a transparent course of the education phase of the citizens' assembly is important

so that everyone can see the basis on which the decision was made. Recommendations may also be different than the current actions of the municipal office or the council, hence a position of openness to change on part of the municipal office and the councillors is very advisable.

One of the key questions affecting the success of the citizens' assembly is the trust of the municipal office that residents are capable of making reasonable decisions which are favourable for the community even in very complicated and technical matters. The officials may have some negative experiences from previous public consultations and be afraid that the meetings of the citizens' assembly will look the same – for example, that they may have a turbulent course and the residents will not be sufficiently familiar with the topic. However, the citizens' assembly has a completely different dynamic than open public consultations, especially, when it is well organised. The residents are put in a position of decision makers, they have an opportunity to get to know one another, and the rules of conducting discussions are agreed.

An especially important role is played by facilitators who set the tone of the meetings. If the members of the citizens' assembly feel they are treated with respect, that coordinators and the municipal office treat the citizens' assembly seriously, that the entire process is something important, then it will foster a positive attitude to the citizens' assembly and it will translate into their engagement and trust.

For all groups of people who participate in the citizens' assembly – for the members of the citizens' assembly, the stakeholders, the experts and for the monitoring team – it is advisable to prepare separate guides in which their role will be presented.



### 3. Topic selection

When the citizens' assembly at the city level is organised, its topic by definition can be anything that falls within the competence of the mayor or the city council. Controversial topics or topics difficult for some reasons work especially well in the citizens' assembly. The organization of the citizens' assembly may, moreover, be combined with work on the municipal strategies – then the most controversial questions may be selected for its completion and the members of the citizens' assembly may be asked to settle them. However, they need not only be controversial issues. The citizens' assembly may be treated as a normal way of decision-making in the matters of the city or at the national level. Generally when a matter is more or less obvious, then there is no need to organise a citizens' assembly, so consequently the best selection for the citizens' assembly are the questions that pose a challenge for some reason.

What is important is that the topic be presented in a clear and precise manner and its scope should be narrow enough to be able to reasonably discuss it in the educational phase. For example while organising the first citizens' assembly in Gdańsk on the topic of the city's preparation for an occurrence of torrential rainfall, we identified a dozen of themes of which only three were eventually selected. One Saturday was allocated for each of them. We could have had more themes but then the citizens' assembly should have been longer in order to discuss and present everything in detail.

The topic of the citizens' assembly should, by principle, concern the entire community rather than only its part. For example,

if a given problem pertains exclusively to a group of senior citizens or to secondary-school students, then, it is better to organise workshops with representatives of those groups and develop solutions in this way. However, good judgment is advised here – sometimes a new programme which concerns a narrow group of residents may raise controversies and, by the very fact, that it is to be financed from the city budget funds (i.e., the money of all residents), it can become a topic of the citizens’ assembly to establish whether the community agrees to its realisation.

Let’s also have a look at a proposal of the development of a housing estate in a park – does this topic concern only the residents of the surrounding areas or rather the whole city? That depends. If it is a park visited by residents from the whole city, then residents from all districts should be invited to participate in the citizens’ assembly. However, if it is a small park where only the local residents go for a walk, then the citizens’ assembly can be organised at the district level.

At the national level, can the changes in the hunting law be a topic of the citizens’ assembly if hunters make up only a small portion of the society? They can because the issue of the wild animals well-being is something that can be considered a subject of interest of the whole society. By the same token, a question of an establishment of a national park may not only be a local matter, although the welfare of the local community is of primary importance here. However, in my opinion, concern for an area which is valuable for its plant and animal life is something that goes beyond the local scope. Hence, such a park is called “national.”

A topic of the citizens’ assembly can be posed as a question, e.g. “How to promote the use renewable energy in our city?” or in form of a problem to solve. It can look like this: “Some

residents say there is a lack of parking spaces in the city centre. What solution will be the best here? Or: “When the drought comes in summer, there is not enough water for all homes. What can we do?”<sup>1</sup>.



Who can submit a topic of the citizens’ assembly? A mayor, a city council or a group of residents who have, e.g., collected an adequate number of signatures, should have the opportunity to submit a topic proposal. In Gdańsk such an opportunity is provided for in the local law and 1000 signatures are needed under an ordinary motion to organise the citizens’ assembly (for around 350 thousand adult residents). Whereas when 5000 signatures are collected then it becomes compulsory for the mayor to organise a citizens’ assembly. It is then a powerful tool in the hands of residents. The citizens’ assembly can

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<sup>1</sup> Lyn Carson’s “Framing the Remit” can be helpful for phrasing a question for the citizens’ assembly. The publication is available on the newDemocracy Foundation website (in “Research Notes”) at: [www.newdemocracy.com.au](http://www.newdemocracy.com.au).

also be organised at the end of the year to establish the topics of the citizens' assembly in the following year.

Can one discuss matters at the city level regarding which the decisions are made at the parliamentary level? Yes, but then it should be defined clearly what will happen later with the recommendations. For example, the mayor may submit them to a relevant minister or MPs, without guaranteeing, however, that they will be adopted since this lies outside of the mayor's authority.



#### **4. Duration of the citizens' assembly**

The experiences from Poland show that the time needed for the preparation of the citizens' assembly at the city level is at least 2-3 months before the first meeting of the assembly. These preparations include the update of the random selection system, a formal notification of the citizens' assembly, selection of facilitators, sending of letters, etc. It may also be the case that this period will be longer than the time frame in which the citizens' assembly will be meeting.

The number of meetings of the citizens' assembly depends on the topic. Depending on how many things need to be discussed, its educational phase may last 2-3 Saturdays or longer. If the citizens' assembly is organised at the regional or national level, then it is a good idea to book an entire weekend due to the time the members of the citizens' assembly spend on commuting. It is also important to allow sufficient time for the members of the citizens' assembly to digest what they have learnt by

allowing them sufficiently long breaks between meetings. It is not a good idea to shorten the process only to finish it faster. The rush is usually not needed unless the matter is urgent indeed.

In turn, the time needed for decision-making is at least two Saturdays. One should bear in mind that it may turn out that additional meetings may be needed, which the very members of the citizens' assembly may decide. This should be taken into consideration while preparing the assembly's budget.



## **5. Organization team**

In Gdańsk “a mixed model” of an organization of the citizens' assembly has been developed which means that part of preparations lies with the municipal office and part (the majority) lies with independent coordinators. For example, the issues regarding the voter registry and the preparation of invitations fall onto the municipal office so that the residents' personal data is not released outside. In practice, 2-3 persons may be involved in the assembly's preparation from the municipal office.

Independent coordinators organizing the citizens' assembly simply ensure its better credibility, in particular regarding the question of creating its programme and inviting experts. On the other hand, the organization of the citizens' assembly by the municipal office is not a good idea because the office is a stakeholder in this process – it may be involved in the actions regarding the topic of the citizens' assembly, may already have prepared some strategies, plans or opinions regarding which

solutions are favourable and what is worth implementing. For this reason the municipal office will no longer be neutral. The municipal office should have an opportunity to propose experts to be invited to the citizens' assembly and to suggest themes, but not to decide on their selection or the shape of the programme. If need be, the municipal office may influence the programme by means of the monitoring team under the same rules as all the remaining members.



It is a good idea to invite persons who “have a knack for participation” to carry out the coordination role for the assembly. In the approach to the organization of the citizens' assembly, the important factors are the respect for residents, positive attitude to people and a good understanding of democracy. The role of a coordinator of the citizens' assembly is a bit like

a role of a restaurant's manager who makes sure the guests are comfortable – here the thing is to provide the members of the citizens' assembly with a possibly comprehensive knowledge on the assembly topic, good conditions for conversation, the best experts, efficient response to emails, etc. A person who has a knack for participation can be identified by noticing that such attitude is natural for them, it is effortless and brings them joy.

While organising the citizens' assembly the point is not only to make sure the members of the assembly feel comfortable (which is important) but to create the conditions for the group's inner wisdom to emerge. The aim is to bring out the best in people. There may be two, three or more coordinators, depending on the situation. At least one of them should come from the city where the citizens' assembly is organised, so that they can be present in person at the current meetings and have a good understanding of the local situation.

The task division can be as follows:

*Municipal office:*

- preparation of the voter registry with division into city districts
- creation of the citizens' assembly's website
- printing and sending out of invitations
- registration of interested applicants by phone
- the first contact with the members of the citizens' assembly selected by lot
- printing of educational materials (if it could be done at the municipal office)
- preparation of contracts for members of the citizens' assembly and experts, payments.

*Coordinators:*

- preparation of the detailed rules of the citizens' assembly
- organization and preparation of the venue
- conducting the random selection process
- preparation of promotional campaign
- organization of the on-line transmission
- posting current information on the citizens' assembly's website
- current contact with the members of the citizens' assembly (sending information)
- preparation of the agenda of the citizens' assembly – the educational phase and the method of recommendation development
- contact with experts and stakeholders
- organization of catering
- selection of facilitators and cooperation with them
- coordination of the course of the citizens' assembly
- preparation and conducting of voting
- preparation of the report on the citizens' assembly.

In order to ensure transparency and the correctness of the course of the citizens' assembly, it is important to appoint also a team to monitor the coordinators' work. The objective is to ensure, e.g., the programme's compliance with the standards of the citizens' assembly as well as representation of all stakeholders within the expert presentations. The monitoring team at the city level can include the representatives of the municipal office, city council and NGOs (if possible, the persons who participated in the previous citizens' assemblies as members). Its proposed size is 7-15 persons.



## 6. Size of the citizens' assembly

When organising a citizens' assembly at the city level, I would suggest the size of at least 50 members. The point is to ensure a sufficient diversity of voices and perspectives in a randomly-selected group. Depending on the city size, the number of the members of the citizens' assembly may, of course, be higher, e.g., in Warsaw it may be as many as 80, 100 or more. The group should be sufficiently large to be perceived by the residents, councillors and city officials as credible and sufficiently representative.

Why is a small citizens' assembly composed of, e.g., 25 persons not a good idea? Because a small group means a small number of perspectives. For example, during the citizens' assembly in Lublin we divided the entire assembly (c.70 persons) into four groups of more or less 16 people and the same questions were discussed in those groups. What turned out was that the particular groups came to quite different conclusions. Some points were common, however, they were not as many as one might expect. Only the collection of conclusions from small groups in the forum of the whole citizens' assembly brought the intended effect. This demonstrates how crucial the group size is. The larger it is, the more perspectives it offers, and that, in turn, translates into the higher quality of recommendations.

In case of very large groups, such as 500 or 1000 people, organizational challenges emerge, such as providing an opportunity for everyone willing to express their views in the forum. The cost of organising meetings is higher, too, which matters if citizens' assemblies are to be organised often and on a regular basis. A large number of members of the citizens' assembly is

justified, however, when matters of principal importance are discussed such as, e.g. amendments to the Constitution. Then, it increases the citizens' assembly's credibility.

Due to the fact that in the course of the citizens' assembly some people may resign or for some reason become unable to continue to participate in the meetings, it is worth selecting substitutes for such people at the very beginning. A safe number is 20% of the basic composition, while basic demographic criteria also apply.



## **7. Ideal composition of the citizens' assembly**

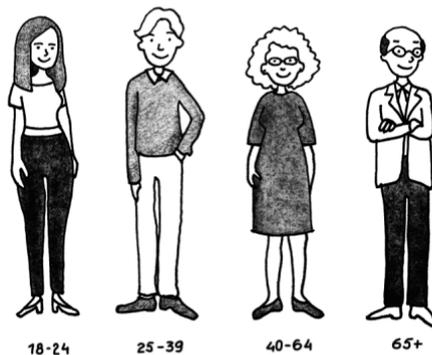
The citizens' assembly should be demographically representative. Which criteria should be chosen? While preparing citizens' assemblies in Poland at the city level, we apply four basic criteria – gender, age group, district and education level. In other countries some other criteria may be included such as, e.g., ethnic group. When people look at the citizens' assembly they should be able to come to a conclusion that “this group feels like us.” The second criterion is based on the perception that the composition “feels right.” While organising the citizens' assembly at the country level one should take into consideration the division into the city, small town and village residents. What about the economic criterion then? It seems from our experience in Poland that when the four basic criteria are applied and the random selection is conducted, that is enough to ensure that the citizens' assembly will be composed of people of different income levels. I find, therefore, that it is not necessary to precisely reflect the various income levels in the community – its diversity will be enough.

In Poland, the details regarding residents' gender, age and residential district are collected in the voter registry. The exact date of birth and gender are contained in the PESEL [Personal Identity] number. Whereas the residential address indicates a district. On that basis we know how many people live in particular districts and what the age and gender structure in the city is. We have adopted a division into four age groups:

- a) 18-24
- b) 25-39
- c) 40-64
- d) 65+.

There can be more age groups – one can apply age brackets even every ten years. The smaller the age range, however, the smaller the number of people who can receive invitations. And this, in turn, translates into the number of people who may potentially register to participate in the citizens' assembly.

The information regarding education level is taken from the National Census. Based on this data we can create an ideal composition of a citizens' assembly in terms of demographics – it is a proportionate reflection of the city's demographic structure in a smaller group.



The ideal composition of the citizens' assembly in Gdańsk with consideration for the gender, age and education level criteria may then look like this:

Table 1

CRITERIA		STRUCTURE	NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY
<b>GENDER</b>			
	<b>AGE</b>		
Female	18–24	3.4%	2
Female	25–39	14.3%	8
Female	40–64	21.2%	12
Female	65+	15.5%	9
Male	18–24	3.4%	2
Male	25–39	13.4%	7
Male	40–64	18.6%	10
Male	65+	10.3%	6
<b>EDUCATION LEVEL</b>			
Primary school, middle school complete and incomplete, no formal education		12.8%	7
Basic vocational school, secondary school and post-secondary school		57.1%	32
Higher education		30.1%	17
			56

What about the division into districts? How many members will fall for each district? Looking at the demographic structure in 5 sample Gdańsk districts (there are 34 in total) we see how different they are in size – table 2.

*Number of residents in five sample districts of Gdańsk – table 2*

DISTRICT	NUMBER OF RESIDENTS
Aniolki	3765
Brętowo	6084
Brzeźno	10323
Chelm	39211
Jasień	11171

We need a way to indicate how many members of the citizens' assembly will come from each district. The basic assumption is that a number of residents in a given district should be reflected in the composition of the citizens' assembly, following the democratic principle – one person, one vote. If the city districts are not that dissimilar in terms of number of residents, then it can be precisely reflected in the composition of the citizens' assembly. But what to do in a situation when the differences are significant as, for example in Gdańsk where the smallest district has slightly over 1 thousand residents and the biggest has over 39 thousand? And what is more, there are 34 districts. If the proportions were to be exact, then the citizens' assembly

would have to be enormous and include hundreds of people, and around 39 people would come from the district of Chełm alone. That's why we are looking for a way to reduce these differences in size. Obviously, in practice that entails a larger representation of residents of small districts (proportionally to the number of residents). If, however, the citizens' assembly is to be composed of 56 people and all districts are to be taken into consideration, then we have no choice and large districts have to have their number of members reduced. How to do it?

In cooperation with Nikodem Mrożek, a mathematician friend from the University of Gdańsk, a method was developed for the purposes of the citizens' assembly, which is a variant of the Penrose method, also known as the square-root method. In order to calculate the number of members of the citizens' assembly one can apply a power of the  $2/3$  degree (or 0.8) of the number of residents of a given district. That bigger exponent contrary to the classic coefficient of  $1/2$ , was selected to ensure a possibly high and, by the same token, more proportionate number of members from large districts. It works as follows:

1. we raise a number of residents of particular districts to the  $2/3$  power (or 0.8),
2. we calculate a sum of those numbers,
3. we calculate the quotients of the results obtained in point 1 by the calculated sum,
4. for the following districts we multiply each quotients by the target number of members of the citizens' assembly and we round it up.

In practice it is easier than it might seem from this description since all one has to do is use a ready-made Excel table. A sample designation of a number of members of the citizens' assembly for particular Warsaw districts using this method was shown in table 3.

Number of members of the citizens' assembly for districts of Warsaw – table 3

District	Number of residents over 18 years old		Percentage of number of all residents	Root	Division by the sum of roots	Number of members of the citizens' assembly
		Calculations for the district of Bemowo (line 2 in Excel)	=B2/B20	=POWER (B2;C9)	=E2/E20	=ROUND (F2* C5;0)
A	B	C	D	E	F	
Bemowo	92193		6.93%	1891.039695	0.066871125	7
Białoleka	79867		6.00%	1720.134733	0.060827567	6
Bielany	103550	Target number	7.78%	2041.733564	0.072199975	7
Mokotów	168939	100	12.70%	2820.341817	0.099733194	10
Ochota	63320		4.76%	1475.764293	0.052186117	5
Praga-Południe	140115		10.53%	2492.756495	0.088149091	9
Praga-Północ	49402	Power	3.71%	1252.770132	0.044300576	4
Rembertów	17909	0.66 (C9)	1.35%	641.2495629	0.022675928	2
Śródmieście	89216		6.71%	1850.513312	0.065438027	7
Targówek	96639		7.27%	1950.745447	0.068982445	7
Ursus	42034		3.16%	1126.098747	0.03982121	4
Ursynów	111291		8.37%	2141.231529	0.075718432	8
Wawer	56414		4.24%	1367.462263	0.04835633	5
Wesoła	17776		1.34%	638.1025313	0.022564642	2
Wilanów	24588		1.85%	790.4552985	0.027952155	3
Włochy	30560		2.30%	912.4334767	0.032265559	3
Wola	106597		8.01%	2081.189798	0.073595231	7
Żoliborz	39723		2.99%	1084.845137	0.038362396	4
<b>Suma</b>	<b>1330133</b>			<b>28278.86783</b>		<b>100</b>

In the ideal composition one also takes into consideration the persons participating as substitute members of the citizens' assembly. Due to the fact that we do not know if and who will need to be substituted, one may assume that the composition of the substitute group will be based on the same demographic criteria as the composition of the whole citizens' assembly.



## 8. Individual profiles

Since the composition of the citizens' assembly is randomly selected by lot, how can we know that the selected persons will satisfy the expected criteria? For this to work, individual demographic profiles of all members who will make up the assembly are prepared. An exemplary individual profile for Gdańsk would be:

- district – Osowa,
- gender – male,
- age group – 25-39,
- education – higher [university].

If 56 people make up the assembly, then there should also be 56 individual profiles. Random selection determines which demographic criteria would be included in a given profile. Due to the fact that the voter registry does not contain information of education level of particular residents, at the beginning it is enough to randomly select only the profiles with consideration for those demographic criteria which are included there – gender, age and district.

Random selection of individual profiles is crucial because only a part of people residing in particular districts will have a chance to receive an invitation to participate in the citizens' assembly. That's why it should be transmitted live online (e.g., in social media) to ensure complete transparency. In practice it only takes a moment: if one prepares the Excel table well, then to conduct random selection one click on Random.org website is enough (numbers of districts selected by lot are assigned to the sets with the remaining criteria). Sample individual profiles in Gdańsk are shown in table 4.

In this example only 1 member of the citizens' assembly falls for the district of Nowy Port. Due to the fact that a woman aged 18-24 was randomly selected, the invitations will be sent only to women who meet these demographic criteria.

*Sample individual profiles in Gdańsk (no education criterion) – table 4*

No.	GROUP	GENDER	AGE	DISTRICT
1	Main	Female	18–24	Nowy Port
2	Main	Female	18–24	Przymorze Wielkie
3	Main	Female	25–39	Letnica
4	Main	Female	25–39	Przeróbka
5	Main	Female	25–39	Stogi
6	Main	Female	25–39	Śródmieście
7	Main	Female	25–39	Śródmieście
8	Main	Female	25–39	Przymorze Małe
9	Main	Female	25–39	Brętowo
10	Main	Female	25–39	Orunia-Św. Wojciech-Lipce

The education criterion can be randomly selected for particular profiles after the registration of all interested persons. Why? It results from the experience in Gdańsk that few people with basic education level apply for participation in the citizens' assembly. Only 12.8% of people who are over 18 have this level of education in Gdańsk. Once the registration of the willing persons is completed, the statistical review in the registration software shows us in which districts there applied people with basic education level. In order to increase their chances of participation in the citizens' assembly and, by the same token, to increase the chances of obtaining an ideal assembly composition, we can assign basic education level only to those districts of which we know that persons with basic education level have actually applied. If the selection by lot was completely random, then it could happen that districts were selected for basic education level where no one of this profile lives. The remaining education levels – secondary school and university – may be randomly selected from the entire pool of districts. Again, one may also opt for complete randomness and decide not to increase the chances of selection of people with basic education level. It is a matter of priorities.



## **9. Sending invitations**

Another question which emerges is to whom should the invitations be sent? Special computer software was developed for this purpose. The list of individual profiles with the information on the number of invitations falling for each of them is uploaded to

it, and then the voter registry is uploaded. The software filters the registry taking into consideration the provided demographic criteria, and that is how we know precisely how many people there are, who satisfy the criteria and whether sending of the scheduled number of invitations is feasible. This is presented in table 5.

*Verification of matching of individual profiles with a number of people in the voter registry – table 5*

Gender	Age from	Age to	District	Number of invitations	Number of people in the profile
Male	40	64	Siedlce	200	2081
Male	40	64	Matarnia	130	945
Female	25	39	Brętowo	168	822
Female	25	39	Przymorze Małe	176	176
Female	25	39	Śródmieście	442	2755

At this stage the random selection is performed electronically. The software connects with an external independent Random.org website, uploads the randomly selected numbers, matches them with the number of people from the voter registry and based on that it prepares the mailing list of those people to whom invitations are meant to be sent. Apart from the mailing list, individual ID numbers are also generated, which will be needed for registration. The random selection results are recorded and a special API key is assigned to it thanks to which it is possible to verify that the Random.org website was indeed used for a given random selection and what the result was.

Now, how many invitations should be sent to people satisfying particular individual demographic profiles? We have assumed

for Gdańsk that the minimum number of invitations falling for one profile should be 100. In Poland one can expect that around 10% people will respond to an invitation (this percentage may differ depending on the city). There are, then, let's say 10 people, on average, who will participate in the final random selection for every profile which is a sufficiently large number to ensure randomness.

The second assumption one can make is that a number of invitations will be related to the number of residents of particular districts (proportionate to the number of residents of the districts) to create equal opportunity to receive an invitation. The third one refers to a total number of invitations – in Gdańsk we have established that it should be around 10 thousand, whereas in Lublin it was 12 thousand (letters with invitations are a very good form of promotion of a citizens' assembly, hence sending out such a large number also has a promotional effect). Having made the preliminary assumptions, one can move on to detailed calculations of how many invitations specifically will fall for each profile.

An invitation should be personal, it should clearly explain what a citizen's assembly is, what its topic is and state the dates of the meetings. The invitations should also contain the information regarding remuneration, registration ID number (randomly selected), website address where one can register and any other useful information – can members bring their children, whether any prior knowledge of the topic is required, what to wear, etc. Depending on who the assembly's organiser is, the invitation should be signed by a mayor, the prime minister or the chair of the city council. Special care should be taken to prepare it in an elegant way. It is a good idea to print the citizens' assembly's logo on the envelope. The whole thing should entice participation and emphasize the importance of the event.



In order to provide the personal data security, the sortition in Gdańsk is conducted at the municipal office, on the office computer. The Random.org website, the software connects with in the selection process, merely generates a random string of numbers (e.g., 3, 14, 67, 98, 45) and sends it to the office computer. No data from the voter registry is released outside. The invitations are also printed at the municipal office so that the residents' addresses are not transferred outside the office.



## **10. Registration of persons willing to participate in the citizens' assembly**

A website for registration is prepared, where everyone who received an invitation and is willing to participate in the citizens' assembly can register. Moreover, it is important to provide an opportunity to register by phone for those who do not use the internet on a daily basis. During registration one enters the ID code which was sent in the invitation as well as their education level so that when registration is completed, all demographic data needed for random selection is collected.

Experience shows that 2 weeks is a good registration period for interested residents. It is long enough to be able to consider whether one wants to participate and at the same time short enough to remember about registration (experiences from Gdańsk indicate that many people register right before the end of the registration period). Registration should be available already on the same day the letters reach post boxes.

To ensure a neutral nature of the citizens' assembly, it is important that the persons who are directly involved in its topic should not be members of the assembly. E.g., if the assembly's topic is climate change, then members of an ecological organization which deals with this issue should come as stakeholders and not as members of the citizens' assembly, even if some of them receive an invitation as a result of random selection. In Poland it is not possible from a legal standpoint to formally exclude someone from the participation in the citizens' assembly. Thus, this is merely a request posted on the registration website to directors of the departments at the municipal office or the councillors not to apply in the capacity of members of the citizens' assembly. The citizens' assembly's credibility is the priority here.

Another issue to be settled is whether one may be a member of the citizens' assembly many times. We may adopt a premise that the same person may become a member of the citizens' assembly e.g., once a year or not more frequently than every third citizens' assembly. The point here is that we want to provide the interested residents with the most opportunity to participate in the citizens' assembly. The basic rule is, however, that the composition of each following citizens' assembly is randomly selected anew.



## 11. Promotional campaign

A promotional campaign is necessary to inform residents that a citizens' assembly is taking place, what it entails and how it can be joined. It is a new form of democracy and the campaign – especially the first one – should be done properly. It should be stressed during the campaign that invitations will be sent out and that people should check their post boxes and that the citizens' assembly will be transmitted live online. A citizens' assembly is an important event in the life of a city or a country and the promotional campaign should reflect that.





## 12. Random selection of members of the citizens' assembly

Members of the citizens' assembly can be randomly selected by electronic sortition. This is the fastest way – one click and a list is ready. However, this may not be credible for everyone. Questions may arise as to what algorithm was applied, how we can know that some people were not stooges or that something was not especially set up on the server, etc. For example in Gdańsk it so happened that in the first round an editor-in-chief of one of the local newspapers and a journalist from that very newspaper were randomly selected. It is worthwhile to have an opportunity to prove that the sortition was carried out correctly – this issue should be beyond any doubts. That is why the final selection is conducted with a roll of a simple dice. The selection is transmitted live and recorded for complete transparency.

To facilitate the selection by dice rolling, a special computer software was developed named *The Panel Helper*. Its task is to filter the database of people who registered to participate in the citizens' assembly in accordance with individual demographic profiles. For example, assuming we have an individual profile: district – Oliwa, gender – female, age group – 18-24, education – secondary school, the software creates a list of all persons who satisfy these criteria. During the process of sortition, however, their names are not visible, only their ID numbers. The person rolling the dice does not know then who is in the pool. But what if there are more than 6 people in the pool, i.e., more than pips on the ordinary dice? Then the preliminary selection is conducted – this time an electronic one with the use of the Random.org

website – in order to narrow down the number of people to 6. The result of that sortition is recorded of course and it can be confirmed. The dice is rolled and the selected number on the dice corresponds to the number on the list. If the list contains only two persons, then one may assume that odd numbers correspond to a person under number 1 and the even numbers to a person number 2. Sortition rules should be described in detail and posted on the citizens’ assembly’s website beforehand.

Experience shows that some people despite the fact that they registered to participate in the citizens’ assembly confirming, by the same token, that they can take part in its meetings, for some reason, however, resign before its commencement. Therefore, a sortition is performed at the beginning for the so-called “standby group” within the same profile. If a person randomly selected as the first resigns, then we can call the next person at once. If the person from the standby group resigns, which also happens, an additional sortition is conducted.

It is a good idea to randomly select also the persons to the substitute group at one go with a separate standby group for them.

In practice sortition happens very quickly. The randomly selected numbers are seen on the screen so the selected persons, if they are watching the transmission, know they were randomly selected. The Panel helper software generates at the end an email and telephone number list of the persons who were selected, so right after the completion information can be sent to them on the sortition results and they can be called to confirm their participation.





### **13. Allowance for members of the citizens' assembly**

Members of the citizens' assembly are entitled to an allowance for their participation in the assembly. In Gdańsk it was established at PLN 600 gross in total. Thanks to this allowance not only persons interested in the topic or already involved in it apply for participation in the assembly, but it also serves as an incentive for those who have not been interested in city matters so far. On a practical side, for some people it covers the costs of participation in the citizens' assembly such as travel costs or organization of childcare (although it has already occurred that mothers participated in a part of a meeting with children). Moreover, the allowance means that the participation in the citizens' assembly is valued. Its lack could result in a change in the demographic composition of the assembly – some people might decide not to participate. The allowance is especially important in the case of the citizens' assemblies which last many weeks.

How to establish its amount? It all depends, of course, on a country where the citizens' assembly is organised and its prosperity. It can be done intuitively – the allowance should be of such an amount as to make it attractive. It does not have to be, or rather it should not be, excessively high. Participation in the citizens' assembly is not something one should do only for money – the intention of its members is crucial. Both in Gdańsk and in Lublin, the allowance was granted for the participation in the whole event, instead of for every day of assembly's meetings. In Gdańsk, each time the citizens' assembly lasted longer than

it had been scheduled for in the agenda and the members of the citizens' assembly came to additional meetings, although, formally, they were no longer covered by the allowance.



## **14. Open consultations**

Before the meetings of the citizens' assembly start, residents are invited to send their preliminary comments regarding the assembly's topic. The simplest way is to email them, however, in order to provide everyone with a chance to send their comments in the most convenient form, it is also good to ensure an opportunity to do it by post – in a letter. The time that can be designated for this is two weeks or more, depending on the topic.

A call for experts and stakeholders who are to present their positions during the citizens' assembly is also open. However, the condition is obviously that they are experts in the given topic. In Gdańsk a proposal of an expert or a stakeholder can be submitted by all interested parties. A stakeholder means an NGO, an office, institution or an informal group which deals with a given matter or is somehow directly connected with it. These proposals can also be sent within open consultations.



## 15. Programme preparation – learning phase

Coordinators do not have to be experts on the topic of the citizens' assembly – e.g., protection of the city against a flood, improvement of air quality or ecological farming. It is even fine if they are not, since then, it is easier for them to remain neutral. The role of coordinators is to be experts on participation processes.

While preparing the programme of the citizens' assembly we start with the search for experts who deal with a given topic and with the identification of stakeholders who are engaged in it. Although, in-depth knowledge and understanding of the topic by coordinators is obviously very useful. The basic questions to ask when contacting experts and stakeholders are:

- what themes or issues should be discussed in the educational phase of the citizens' assembly?
- who is an expert able to present it in a clear and easy to understand way?
- who is a stakeholder in this topic who should receive an invitation?

When preparing the programme in the educational phase, one usually starts with an introduction to the topic and the situation diagnosis, followed by expanding on the topic in detail and the presentation of possible solutions.

When choosing an expert, it is worthwhile considering the fact that the audience will be a group of people who may not be specialists in this field. Actually, almost certainly they will not. It is not as important here how many publications an expert has and in which magazines, but primarily whether they

can present their knowledge in a concise and understandable manner. The articles and other publications can always be provided to the members of the citizens' assembly as additional educational materials.

What is worth distinguishing while preparing the programme in the educational phase of the citizens' assembly are the presentations which provide a background for a given topic. For example, when organising a citizens' assembly in Gdańsk on the improvement of air quality, we invited experts who presented the effect of coal burning on climate and the issue of diminishing resources of fossil fuels. Those were precisely the presentations which constituted the background alongside presentations regarding the results of measurements of air quality in Gdańsk. On the other hand, something altogether different are the presentations of particular solutions – the application of heat pumps to heat flats instead of burning coal in furnaces, thermal insulation of buildings, etc. This differentiation is crucial since the same amount of time should be allotted to the presentations regarding solutions in order to avoid favouritism if one presentation is given more time. The case is quite different, however, with presentations providing a background of some topic. Here, the time may be different.

At the beginning there should usually appear a diagnosis, i.e., the presentation of the current situation. When organising a citizens' assembly at the city level, we provide time for the municipal office, so it is clear to the members of the citizens' assembly what actions have been conducted up to this point. Generally speaking, the coordinators' way of thinking is as follows: what is needed to make an informed decision in a given matter? What should one know? What will affect the decision? Who will present it best?

In case of the presentations of solutions, it is crucial to present the widest possible range, the full range would be ideal. Some experts are invited to present their position during the meeting of the citizens' assembly in person, and some may be asked to do so in writing or record a video. Nowadays, it can be done even with a smartphone so it does not generate great costs. It is crucial that all stakeholders are convinced that their perspective is represented during the expert presentations. Hence, it is worth meeting with stakeholders already at the beginning of the programme preparation.



Due to the fact that the capacity of the members of the citizens' assembly for learning new information, as well as time they can spare for the participation in the citizens' assembly are limited, the basic formula for expert presentations is the following:

- the first expert presentation – 12 minutes,
- the second expert presentation – 12 minutes,

- time for discussion by members of the citizens' assembly in groups and preparation of questions – 10 minutes,
- questions to experts and answers – 10 minutes.

If time runs out and not all questions are asked, then they are collected and forwarded to experts in writing. Then, there is time for a break and another block of expert presentations.

However, expert presentations may last longer, in Gdańsk there were some that lasted 20 minutes. Those longer presentations related to the background of the topic. The standard 12 minutes we use is, on one hand, very little, but, on the other hand, it encourages experts to consider what is the most crucial in a given problem. Each of them can prepare additional materials the number of which is not limited. Similarly, the stakeholders may deliver an unlimited number of additional materials.

In group discussions by the members of the citizens' assembly the following questions may be useful: what was the most important in what you have heard? What new information have you found out? Was there anything unclear you would like to ask about?

In this part of the citizens' assembly another formula can be applied, so instead of asking experts questions in an open forum, a "speed-dating" with experts can be organised. How it works is that after presentations of their positions in a forum, the members of the citizens' assembly prepare in groups questions to experts and they in turn come to each small group for a 7-10 minute conversation.

It is of key importance that the experts and stakeholders prepare abstracts with principal arguments from their presentations and with proposals of solutions. They are published on the citizens' assembly's website and constitute a significant contribution to the works of the citizens' assembly later on.

Selection of experts obviously has an enormous influence on the quality of citizens' assembly's recommendations. Hence, it is worthwhile to do one's best to invite the best people in the field, not only from a given country but also from abroad. It is possible to connect with a foreign expert live via the internet or record them. This is the part of the citizens' assembly where we spare no costs. The aim is, after all, a presentation of the best possible solutions in a given matter.

Before each meeting of the citizens' assembly in the educational phase it is good to organise a working meeting for experts and stakeholders during which the meeting's agenda is presented and it is discussed who will be speaking about what. Consequently, the experts can prepare their presentations so they do not cover the same information as the others, and stakeholders can better prepare their positions since they know what will be presented and by whom.

The part of the meeting designated for stakeholders is prepared in a slightly different way. The assumption here is that the stakeholders are only identified – they are not selected. If a given organization is dealing with the citizens' assembly's topic, it automatically becomes a stakeholder and has a right to present its position during the citizens' assembly. While organising a citizens' assembly at the city level, the time allotted for the stakeholders' presentations may be 60-90 minutes. A lot depends on how many stakeholders have applied. It is a block on the agenda at the end of the day, following the expert presentations. The municipal office can one day have both an expert presentation as well as a chance to react to what has been said by others in the part for stakeholders. If there are many stakeholders, then joining positions is an option and a representative can be selected who will present a joint position

of the organizations' group. This can only be a decision by the stakeholders themselves – coordinators do not interfere, they may only suggest what can work better based on their experience or discernment. 7-10 minutes is a good time for a presentation. After every few presentations, 10 minutes should be reserved for asking questions by the public.

Following the stakeholders' presentations, if possible, it is good to assign a few moments for summaries by the experts – 2 minutes per person. Although these are very short presentations, they serve as both an opportunity to point out certain things and the time for the last comment.

It is crucial that members of the citizens' assembly should be able to independently invite experts if they deem it necessary. It can work so that a proposal to invite an expert (both a specific person as well as someone to discuss some theme) can be made by each member of the citizens' assembly, which is subject to a vote. If the citizens' assembly is in favour by an ordinary majority, then coordinators invite a given person in the capacity of an expert. Members of the citizens' assembly should know as soon as possible who will take the floor as an expert to have an opportunity to consider whom else they want to invite. To that purpose, before the meetings they can be sent a list of experts who will be presenting their positions.

The educational phase of the citizens' assembly – presentations by experts and stakeholders and Q&A sessions – should be transmitted live and recorded. For their presentations, experts receive remuneration and reimbursement of travel and accommodation costs. However, remuneration is not granted to stakeholders.

The first day, the open part of the citizens' assembly, before the presentations by experts and stakeholders, should be opened

by a mayor or the chair of the city council, and it should be stressed that the citizens' assembly's recommendations will be treated as having a binding effect on them.



## **16. Building an atmosphere – integration phase**

Before, however, the members of the citizens' assembly start to listen to the expert presentations, it is important that they meet and build an atmosphere which will be conducive to conversation, delving deep into the topic and acting for the common good.

On the first day the members of the citizens' assembly are usually asked to come a bit earlier to handle formalities. Tea, coffee and biscuits should be waiting for them. It is advisable to make sure that there are organic products and, if possible, coming from Fair Trade. This day starts with a closed part – coordinators and facilitators welcome the members of the citizens' assembly and once again explain what the citizens' assembly consists in and what the members' role is. Then, facilitators take the floor and the rules of discussion during the citizens' assembly are agreed or presented. They can include, for example: respect, openness, attentive listening, sticking to the topic, care of one's needs and silencing of mobile phones.

The meeting of members of the citizens' assembly can be conducted in 4-person groups in a few rounds with the assumption that the members change the group each time. A separate table can be assigned for each group but it is not necessary. In Gdańsk, chairs are numbered in such a way that they create

4-person “nests” without any tables. Members receive pieces of paper with nest numbers drawn by lot while they are prepared in such a way that they can meet the largest number of people possible, so ideally, people should not sit at the same nests multiple times. During each round members are invited to introduce themselves to others – say their name and what they do. The topics for integration conversations may include:

- what is wonderful about my city?
- what places do I enjoy going to?
- if I were the mayor, what would I do?

This part can also be conducted using Speed Dialogue or World Café principles. Coffee (tea) breaks and a longer lunch break also play an integrational role. In particular, during lunch break members of the citizens’ assembly should be encouraged to talk to experts in an informal way.

While ordering the catering service, a plant-based menu (at least partially) might be a good choice. A plant-based cuisine has this advantage that it is, in fact, for everyone. There is no need to wonder how many vegetarian, and how many vegan dishes to prepare, since everyone can eat all dishes. It is important, however, to check whether anyone has any special dietary needs such as no-gluten diet. The priority is for all members of the citizens’ assembly to enjoy their food. All-plant dishes will be a success when they are of very good quality and the chefs are able to satisfy different tastes of the members of the assembly so that everyone can find something for themselves and enjoy the meal. All-plant cakes are also possible. During the first citizens’ assembly in Gdańsk, members only at the end found out that all cakes were vegan – prepared with no milk or eggs – which was welcomed with applause because they simply loved them.



Some time can also be assigned in the programme for a mindfulness workshop – the improvement of the listening skills, putting aside any potential prejudices and assessments, development of empathy and releasing negative emotions (the letting go technique is particularly useful here). These are obviously things which may require more time to develop, even years, nonetheless, even signaling them during a short workshop may have a positive effect on the group and the course of the citizens' assembly. This is particularly crucial in the case of topics which are emotionally engaging. The mindfulness workshop can be scheduled in the programme at the end of the first day or on an additional day so the attendance will be voluntary.

In Gdańsk the meetings of the citizens' assembly usually start at 10:00 a.m. and last until 4:00 p.m. Members may come already at 9:00 a.m. for tea or coffee. The time before the meeting starts is also an occasion for informal talks or to read additional

materials. Whereas at the end of each day some time should be reserved to discuss as a whole group what was happening on a given day as a summary. As needed, this part may start with a short conversation in small groups followed by a presentation of conclusions during the plenary part of the meeting.



## **17. Programme verification**

The role of the monitoring team is to verify whether coordinators prepared the programme correctly – what should be verified in particular is whether different perspectives were included and whether the time assigned for particular presentations raises no concerns. It should also be verified if the themes are ordered correctly. What happens in a situation when the monitoring team has reservations and the coordinators maintain that the decisions they have made are correct? Then, a procedure of programme verification can be initiated. It may refer to a question of expert selection, time or theme. The assumption adopted here is that members of the monitoring team do not have to be experts on the topic of the citizens' assembly. Hence, if something raised any doubts in them, outside experts are invited to make a final decision.

This can be done in the following way – the procedure of programme verification is initiated upon a motion of at least 40% of the monitoring team and then:

1. a list of 10 largest universities in the country is prepared.  
If there are a few universities in a given city, then it can be assumed that the one which was established

as first is selected. The point is to avoid arbitrariness when preparing the basic list. Moreover, each member of the monitoring team can indicate one university or college of their choice.

2. In all those universities we look for the chairs, institutes or laboratories whose specialisation is the closest to the topic of the citizens' assembly.
3. We prepare a list of employees of those chairs who have at least a doctorate degree. Out of them 3 or 4 persons are drawn with the assumption that they should come from different universities. This way a group of experts is selected whose role is to decide the dilemma regarding the programme of the citizens' assembly.

A group of experts should make decisions unanimously or at least with a decided majority (e.g., 3 votes in favour for 4 experts) since this would indicate that a change in the programme is clearly needed. If the required level of consensus is not reached, then the voice of experts is treated as advisory and the decision lies with coordinators.



## **18. Facilitators**

A role of persons conducting the meetings of the citizens' assembly is a lot more than just giving the floor or introducing experts. The role of facilitators is to create a good atmosphere during meetings, trust among members and to support with their own attitude (integrity) the credibility of the whole process.

Facilitators support the group also in preparation of recommendations, while maintaining their neutrality – without judging the submitted proposals. What traits are desired in facilitators? First of all, they should simply like people and have a good contact with the group. The facilitators should inspire trust, they should be able to listen mindfully and, ideally, they should exude kindness which is sensed by others. Also important are the skills of supporting a team in formulating thoughts or preparing exercises which help the group to digest a given topic and bring out the collective wisdom. Facilitators should also know how to deal with “difficult” situations that is, e.g., when tension occurs in the group or when one of the members of the assembly loses their nerve. Facilitators set the tone of the meetings of the assembly. Of crucial significance is also the ability to be present (recommended books on this topic are: “The Power of Now” by Eckhart Tolle and “The Sedona Method” written by Hale Dwoskin).

In the educational phase, one person is sufficient to announce experts and stakeholders. However, when the time for developing recommendations comes, two or even three persons may be needed, depending on the style of the meetings. In my estimation, the assembly coordinators may also be the facilitators, if need be. It all depends on the situation<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> “Facilitating with Heart” written by Martha Lasley may be a useful resource for facilitators of the meetings of the citizens’ assembly.



## 19. Developing recommendations

Once the members of the citizens' assembly have studied the topic in depth and have digested it, there comes the time for the development of final recommendations. This may take two or more days, depending on the range of thematic scope of the assembly. The following things need to be done in this phase:

- agreeing on a vision of where the members are going (a vision of the city after the implementation of recommendations) or, in other words, establishing what they want in a given matter,
- if need be, deepening understanding of the topic or principal issues, determining guiding principles and values,
- refreshing of proposals offered by experts and stakeholders,
- submitting preliminary proposals of recommendations by the members,
- analysing recommendation proposals and their clarification,
- collecting comments on the recommendation proposals from experts, stakeholders and residents,
- analysis of the collected comments by the members of the citizens' assembly,
- a new analysis of the recommendation proposals by the citizens' assembly,
- selecting recommendations.

This phase is prepared depending on the assembly's topic and the role of coordinators and facilitators is to sense what the members of the citizens' assembly need in order to be ready to submit rec-

ommendation proposals and to make their final choice in an informed manner. The programme of this phase may look differently if the question asked of the citizens' assembly is framed as "Should we allow moose hunting?" (which implies yes/no answer), and still different, when it regards the question of "How" – "How to protect moose?"<sup>3</sup>. The latter topic will have a significantly large number of solution proposals to choose from and discuss. This phase of the citizens' assembly can be conducted in a number of ways and there is a large leeway for coordinators and facilitators to discover new solutions. I would like to present a few solutions which have worked for us as an inspiration and something to use.



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<sup>3</sup> A topic of such a citizens' assembly can also be framed in a more open way, e.g. "The moose population has increased in our region and we have many reports on losses in farming and in tree planting in forests. What can we do in this situation?" Moose culling is here just one of many possible options. This issue has recently appeared in Poland and the lifting of the ban on moose hunting was considered by the Ministry of Environment. The idea was dropped due to social protests.

A useful element which was introduced during the organization of the citizens' assembly in Gdańsk is "the booklets", i.e., collected conclusions and solution proposals which were submitted by experts, stakeholders and from open consultations. They are printed for the meeting and since there are usually lots of them, the whole booklet comes out as a result. We have noticed that in time between meetings some things could escape the members of the citizens' assembly, they may not remember a part of the presentations and what was proposed. Hence, before submission of solution proposals by the members of the citizens' assembly, it is good to save some time to recall what was proposed in a given topic. Practically it means the time assigned in the programme for booklet reading. This is also the time for a personal reflection. The following step can be a discussion in groups in order to exchange what important things are to be done in the opinion of particular persons. Obviously, it is good to email the booklets beforehand and deliver the printed versions to those who do not use the internet. However, we can assume that not everyone has read them before the meeting, so it is a good idea to ensure that the members of the assembly familiarise themselves with those materials during the meeting. And if someone has already read them, then they have time to review them or to talk to other members.

Depending on the topic, the cost-benefit matrix may be useful. Four flipcharts are needed to prepare it in the group forum. Let us take a topic of climate change for example. On the first flipchart, we will present the benefits of introducing changes to protect the climate. On the second flipchart, the costs of change will be recorded. The third flipchart is dedicated to the benefits of maintaining the status quo – doing nothing – and the fourth one, the costs of doing nothing. This exercise allows us to better

understand what can be brought by changes if we decided to implement them and what will happen if we do not.

The preliminary recommendation proposals can be collected in the classical framework of “brain-storming.” We can adopt a principle that each member of the citizens’ assembly can submit a solution proposal. It can be something that the experts or stakeholders had proposed earlier, it can also be something that will originate with the very members of the assembly. At this stage the proposals are not evaluated – they are just recorded the way they are submitted. Each member of the citizens’ assembly can submit any number of them. The purpose of it is that every idea which may be a solution to a given topic is submitted and recorded. Members of the citizens’ assembly should feel at ease. The time for evaluation, analysis and editing of proposals will come later. It is good to record the proposals immediately on the computer and display it on the screen. Initially, we were doing it on flipcharts, but the persons who were sitting at the back signalled that it was not easy for them to read.

This phase can also be conducted applying the “dynamic facilitation” method. Then, we can prepare four flipcharts on which there will be collected: problems (challenges, issues), solutions (possible options), things that raise concern or worry, and on the last one – data or facts. One of the books regarding this method is “From Conflict to Creative Collaboration” written by Rosa Zubizarreta.

The creation of a vision of the city following the introduction of the citizens’ assembly’s recommendations is very useful as an introductory exercise. What will the city look like? What is the ideal state we want to achieve? Having established that, we can, then, as the next step, wonder which recommendations will lead to that.



Discussions may be conducted in small groups, e.g., according to the World Café principles, or in groups comprising even a dozen people. In the latter case, it is advisable for facilitators to moderate the conversation. The advantage of smaller groups is that each person has a greater chance to speak, whereas the benefit of larger groups is greater diversity of opinions and perspectives.

Before the citizens' assembly commences, the following question should be settled which will matter at this stage – who may submit a recommendation proposal that will be put to a vote? The following options are available:

1. a recommendation proposal is developed by a group of members of the citizens' assembly (all proposals submitted by experts, stakeholders and residents can, of course, be used as an inspiration),

2. a recommendation proposal may be submitted by any member of the citizens' assembly,
3. a recommendation proposal may be submitted by any member of the citizens' assembly, invited expert or stakeholder,
4. a recommendation proposal may be submitted by any member of the citizens' assembly, invited expert or stakeholder and any resident (having collected an adequately large number of signatures supporting it or individually).

The advantage of the first option is that there instantly emerge proposals which have the support of at least some of the members. Again, when the proposals of experts or other people are put to vote (option 4), it is certain that none of them will be left out and the members of the citizens' assembly will consider all of the proposals. It is advantageous from the experts' point of view since they know that the proposals they had presented will be considered. This approach was utilised in Lublin and in the final voting the proposals which did not appear in group discussions were adopted. However, this option may mean that a number of proposals to consider and discuss will be enormous which is very time-consuming.

Once we have collected the recommendation proposals, it is worthwhile analysing them all, one by one, while verifying primarily:

- is the recommendation proposal an answer to the question posed to the citizens' assembly?
- is the proposal clear?

Decision on the compliance or non-compliance with the topic of the citizens' assembly will be made by the members themselves. We can apply here a simple vote by a show of hands and an ordinary majority of votes. Moreover, we can verify whether

a given proposal is supported by, e.g., at least 5 of the members of the assembly (depending on group size it can be established at 10%). The point is that the proposals which have only minimal support in the group and are controversial, will not be presented to the local community in the following stage, even though we know anyway that they would be discarded in the final voting. However, that depends on the style of conducting a discussion in this phase of the assembly. If the preliminary recommendation proposals are already well discussed and it is evident that the group agrees, it is not necessary.

The preliminary recommendation proposals are then forwarded to experts and all interested stakeholders and published on the internet in order to collect remarks and comments on them. It is also good to ensure there is ample time for experts to read one another's comments and respond to them, if such need arises. The comments of the experts may be incompatible, in which case it is advisable to provide adequate opportunity for each expert to justify his or her position in greater detail, and respond to the comment of another person. This aspect may prove crucial since the members of the citizens' assembly largely depend on the expertise provided by the experts and a pertinent remark may determine the adoption or rejection of a recommendation.

If the citizens' assembly is organised at the city level, then the members of the assembly will need information regarding each recommendation proposal in the following questions:

- Is it legal?
- In whose authority lies the realisation of this recommendation?
- What is an estimated cost of its realisation?

Preparation of the answers to those questions lies with the municipal office which, moreover, has an opportunity to

address them in terms of content. It would be advisable to schedule a sufficient amount of time for that.

Public presentation of the preliminary recommendation proposals aims at engaging the community in the whole process. This provides residents with an opportunity to present their opinions and, for members of the citizens' assembly, it serves as an occasion to learn about the perspective of the residents who were not randomly selected for the citizens' assembly. An open meeting for residents can be also organised in this part.

The collected comments and remarks are forwarded in advance to the members of the citizens' assembly and printed for the last meeting – if there are many of them, it may turn out that they will be in a form of new booklets.

“A personal reflection form” can be prepared for members of the citizens' assembly as homework. It is a table in which all recommendation proposals are put and next to them there is space reserved for making notes on the following questions:

- What are the strong and the weak points of a given recommendation?
- What needs stand behind this recommendation? (as an auxiliary material, participants can be given a list of basic human needs as used, for example, in the Nonviolent Communication).

At the beginning of the last meeting of the citizens' assembly, some time can be assigned for the exchange of reflections regarding recommendation proposals in small groups, before discussion of all the proposals in turn in the full forum, asking the members these three questions. The point is that everyone realizes what are the advantages and disadvantages of particular solutions, their consequences, and, as a result, that the decision-making is as informed as possible.

Moreover, it can be verified whether a given proposal causes resistance. It is done by asking people to raise one hand if they feel resistance, and both hands if the resistance is very strong. In case of no resistance, people do not raise hands. People who feel resistance can be asked to clarify its reason if, of course, they will agree to discuss it. It allows the group to better understand the perspective of other people.

Participants can be reminded on that day what they concluded to be the common good in a given topic, and what aim they wish to achieve, so that it can serve as the background for discussion.



## **20. Decision-making – verification of consensus**

In an ideal situation, once all recommendation proposals, their pros and cons are discussed, then what should be adopted and rejected becomes obvious. What remains is just to verify whether a consensus has been reached. It can be done by ballot unless there exists a possibility of individual electronic voting (e.g., by using laptops). The advantage of ballot voting is its credibility – if need arises, the votes can be recounted and it can be shown how the members of the citizens' assembly voted.

If in a given question only one recommendation proposal was submitted, consensus can be verified by asking the members to mark one out of eight positions on their ballots:

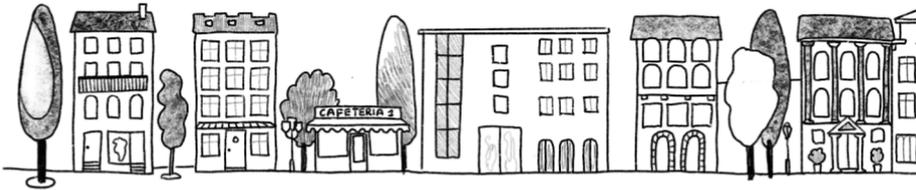
1. I strongly agree,
2. I agree,
3. I agree, although I have certain doubts or objections,

4. I have many doubts,
5. I rather disagree,
6. I disagree,
7. I strongly disagree,
8. It has already been realised to a sufficient degree.

A support for the adoption of the recommendation proposal is expressed exclusively by positions 1, 2 and 3. Marking any other position translates into a failure to support the recommendation proposal. There are so many positions to choose from that everyone can indicate their position with precision and sincerity. The eighth option can come in handy in a situation when some recommendation proposal has already been realised and members of the citizens' assembly support it and do not want to vote against it, by rejecting it. Then, they may indicate that, in their opinion, it is something that has already been realized in a satisfactory manner (as a result, however, the recommendation proposal does not pass). The result is obtained by verifying how many persons marked particular positions and presenting the total support in percentages (positions 1-3 are added to verify the support level for each recommendation).



PROPOSAL	1. I strongly agree	2. I agree	3. I agree, although I have certain doubts or objections
This is the best book on democracy I have ever read.			
An action film should be made based on this book.			
I would be great to be selected for the citizens' assembly.			



Choose one option by putting an „X”  
in an appropriate box for each proposal.

Options 1, 2, 3 translate into support for the recommendation,  
whereas options 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 – for rejecting it.

4. I have many doubts	5. I rather disagree	6. I disagree	7. I strongly disagree	8. It has al- ready been realised in sufficient degree



What about a situation if in a given question a number of recommendation proposals have been submitted which are mutually exclusive? One can vote with a range of options as above or preferentially, indicating the chosen options. When the voting with a range of options is utilised, members of the citizens' assembly evaluate proposals exactly the same way as above. The mutually exclusive options are put into one block on the ballot and marked with a colour, for example, making it clear that only one option may be chosen out of these proposals. The difference lies in the way those votes are counted. If there were e.g. three proposals to choose from, then the first thing which is verified is whether they exceeded the support level of 80%. If this threshold was exceeded only by one proposal, the case is clear – it is deemed to be selected. If, however, two or all exceeded the threshold, then the votes of support are converted into points:

1. I strongly agree – 3 points,
2. I agree – 2 points,
3. I agree, although I have certain doubts or objections – 1 point.

The option which has obtained the largest number of points is considered to be selected.

When preferential voting is utilised, then a separate ballot may be prepared for clarity. A person votes in such a way that they mark “1” next to their best option, “2” – next to the second best, “3” – next to the third best (and so on if there are more options). It must be established whether for the validly cast vote there should be entered as many preferences as there are options, or perhaps, there can be fewer of them. This affects the result of the vote, so it is a crucial matter and one which may prove controversial (during the organization of the citizens'

assembly in Lublin the discussion among coordinators regarding this issue took a few hours and as a result the above method of voting with a range of options and conversion into points was developed). Again, if someone marks only the first preference, then it creates majority voting instead of the preferential one. The question arises whether members of the citizens' assembly should be "forced" to mark all options or should be given freedom not to mark them all. The latter solution can be chosen, at the same time encouraging the members to indicate the maximum number of preferences, while deciding to count the votes using the Modified Borda Count.

How does that work? Let us assume that there are five options to choose from. If someone indicated their five preferences, then, their first preference obtains 5 points, the second one – 4 points, the third one – 3 points, etc. However, if someone indicated only two preferences, then the first one obtains 2 points, the second one – 1 point. The strength of one vote in such case is smaller and it is worthwhile to mark all options. It is by no means required. Counting votes in this method can be facilitated by an application developed by Peter Emerson from the de Borda Institute called the Decision-Maker. It can be ordered from the Institute ([www.deborda.org](http://www.deborda.org)) and is also available online on [www.decision-maker.org](http://www.decision-maker.org). One can also independently prepare an Excel spreadsheet to calculate the result.

But how can we know then that consensus has been achieved? It can be verified by calculating the consensus coefficient. It is done the following way: a number of points that a given proposal obtained is divided by the maximum number of points possible to obtain. Then it can be converted into percentages and verified if the assumed level, e.g., 80% was achieved.

Due to the fact that the premise of the citizens' assembly is to look for a consensus, the voting can be repeated. It should be established early on how many times it can be done, for example, 2 or even 5 times, which should be clearly stated. The point is to verify whether it is possible to work out such a recommendation everyone or almost everyone can agree to. So if some proposal did not obtain the required support level, then it can be modified to answer the needs of those in whom it arises objections or to discuss it once again. The purpose is to find the best possible solutions which will contribute to the improvement of quality of life and to look for solutions for the common good. It must also be established when the voting can be repeated, that is, e.g., upon a motion of one member of the citizens' assembly and when at least half of the assembly seconds it.

It is good to count the results of the vote immediately, on site. When voting consists of indicating positions in scale, the results of the vote are entered in an Excel spreadsheet. A 2-person team is required – one person reads out the position on the ballot, and the other enters them into the spreadsheet. There may be a few such teams, for swifter vote counting. To ensure transparency and credibility of voting, each ballot should be marked with a letter of the Excel column and if there is more than one computer, also the computer number. For example, an annotation can be made on the ballot reading “C1, B” which means that this vote was entered into the Excel spreadsheet in computer 1 to column B. Then, if need be, it can be verified whether this was done correctly and, at the same time, the secrecy of the ballot is maintained.

On that day, once the voting is over and the votes are being counted, it is good to serve cake and take a photograph together.



## **21. Announcement of the results of the citizens' assembly**

It is good to announce the results of voting as soon as possible, even right after the completion of vote counting. One can ensure a live transmission online and immediately post it on the website. Who should present the assembly's recommendations? Those who have developed them, i.e., the representatives of the members of the citizens' assembly. It would be good if the municipal office announced in advance when it would refer to the results, e.g., that it would be a week or even a month after their announcement so there is ample time to consider them. An official delivery of the recommendations to the mayor or the chair of the city council can also be organised.



## 22. Implementation of recommendations

What remains to be done is the implementation of the citizens' assembly's recommendations. It should be done in as transparently as possible – the information on the realisation stage of particular recommendations should be available on the website, ideally with information on who is responsible for implementing each of them. It should also be made clear if the mayor or the city council decided to implement recommendations with the support lower than 80%. In this case it a rationale should be provided.

Depending on which recommendations were developed, members of the citizens' assembly can be invited to cooperate in the development of detailed concepts of their realisation. A meeting for members of the assembly can also be organised a year later to personally present to them how the recommendation they had developed are implemented. It is also a good idea to create of a team with experts which will prepare a detailed concept of implementation of the assembly's recommendations.

If, on the other hand, the citizens' assembly was organised at the national level and referred to the change in law, then all information on the legislative process and their final result should be posted on the website. Moreover, evidently, members of the citizens' assembly should receive this information by email or letter.



### **23. Citizens' assemblies as a permanent element of democracy**

Citizens' assemblies can be organised ad hoc when an important issue needs to be settled, but they can also become a standard element of democracy – a way to make decisions in a city or in a country. At the city level, an assumption can be made that at least 3 or 4 citizens' assemblies a year are organised. A new body can be created for the whole year which will decide on the topics for citizens' assemblies – the citizens' senate. To participate in it, the members of the assembly, i.e. the persons who already have experience with this form of democracy

can be invited. The citizens' senate can operate under similar principles as a citizens' assembly – its composition will reflect the city's demographic structure, participation will be ensured only by random selection and it will be able to invite experts to support them. The role of the citizens' senate may include:

- establishing the assemblies' topics for the coming year,
- employing the assemblies' coordinators,
- approval of significant proposals of changes in the assembly's organization procedure,
- monitoring of recommendation implementation<sup>4</sup>.

One could become a member of the senate, for example, for 1 year (or a bit longer), and its composition would change by 1/3, every few months. New members would receive proper training and most of its members, already experienced in its works, would remain on board in order to provide continuity. A creation of the citizens' senate is a solution which allows us to nest the citizens' assemblies in the democratic system, and, moreover, it provides society with an opportunity to exercise control over a mode of assembly organization, over their quality and importance.



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<sup>4</sup> The idea presented here was inspired by the model created by an international group of experts in Eupen in Belgium for the German-speaking Community.



## Appendix:

### Basic standards for organizing citizens' assemblies

- 1. Random selection of participants** – all members of a citizens' assembly are selected by lot. Ideally, every member of the population eligible to take part in a citizens' assembly should be able to potentially receive invitation to participate.
- 2. Demographic representation** – the composition of a citizens' assembly should broadly match the demographic profile of the community participating in the process. A set of criteria may be used to ensure demographic representativeness of the group, like age, gender, geographic area, or others. The aim is to create a community in a small scale that “feels like us”. The size of the group should allow for inclusion of a wide diversity of views. A stipend should be provided to all participants to the amount that would at least cover the costs of attending the citizens' assembly.
- 3. Independent coordination** – the citizens' assembly is run by an independent team of coordinators, which is responsible especially for preparing the process of random selection, developing the agenda, and inviting experts and facilitators. If the citizens' assembly is organized by local authorities or the parliament, it is important that all members of the coordination team are not part of the civil service. The coordinators should be impartial, e.g. not active politicians or direct stakeholders.

4. **Citizens' assembly can invite experts** – despite the programme being prepared by the team of coordinators, the citizens' assembly can invite additional experts of their own choice. This may be in the form of a speech in person, a video streaming, a recording, a written note or other.
5. **Inclusion of a widest practical range of perspectives** – if there are diverse solutions and perspectives on a subject, ideally all of them should be presented during the educational phase of the citizens' assembly (by expert speakers). A method of combining perspectives due to a limited time or other practical considerations may be applied. Presentations may have the form of a speech in person, a video streaming, a recording, a written note or other.
6. **Inviting all stakeholders** – any organization, informal group or an institution whose area of work and expertise is related to the topic of the citizens' assembly has the right to present its opinion to the citizens' assembly in person. The role of the team of coordinators is only to identify the stakeholders – they don't make a selection. Due to limited time and a large number of stakeholders, a method of choosing their representatives may be used. In this case, a diversity of perspectives should be taken into account.
7. **Deliberation** – discussions which include listening to others mindfully and weighing options are the key elements of a citizens' assembly. The programme should involve discussions in small groups as well as in the plenary in order to maximize opportunities to speak and to be heard. The deliberation phase should be run by skilled facilitators.

8. **Openness** – all members of society should be able to provide input to the citizens’ assembly in the form of comments, proposals or suggestions.
9. **Sufficient time for reflection** – providing a sufficient amount of time for reflection is necessary to achieve well-thought-out decisions. If the matter is not urgent, it is best not to rush. The citizens’ assembly should be able to prolong its meetings – their length and number – if it chooses to do so (subject to budgetary limits).
10. **Impact** – the follow-up to the citizens’ assembly’s recommendations should be clear from the outset. Ideally, recommendations that receive the support of the citizens’ assembly at an agreed threshold should be treated as binding (to such an extent that is legally permissible in the given situation).
11. **Transparency** – all presentations during the educational, plenary phase should be transmitted live and recorded. All materials presented to the citizens’ assembly should be made available online. Clear information about how recommendations of the citizens’ assembly will be implemented should be provided online and updated as actions occur. A report presenting details of methodology used for organizing a citizens’ assembly should be provided by the coordination team.

**12. Visibility** – each citizens’ assembly is an important event in the life of a community and citizens should be informed that it is happening and information on how they can get involved and follow it should be provided. The citizens’ assembly should be publicly announced before it is formed.

*This set of standards was created by Marcin Gerwin with input from experts around the world.*



## Support in organizing and promoting citizens' assemblies



*A guide to citizens' assemblies can be downloaded as a PDF or an e-book in various languages from: [citizensassemblies.org](http://citizensassemblies.org) and [otwartyplan.org](http://otwartyplan.org).*

*If you would like to organise a citizens' assembly, in particular, with regards to topics related to nature conservation or sustainability, and you need support, you are welcome to contact the author at: [marcin@citizensassemblies.org](mailto:marcin@citizensassemblies.org).*

**A citizens' assembly** is a new form of democracy suitable for making decisions at a city, national or even at the international level. A citizens' assembly is a randomly selected group of residents according to the demographic criteria such as gender or age. It constitutes a city or a country in miniature. A role of a citizens' assembly is an in-depth analysis of a given issue, a deliberation over different solutions, hearing of the pros and cons, and then, making informed decisions. Marcin Gerwin's guide is a step-by-step presentation of how to organise a citizens' assembly, with the primary focus on the city level.



Marcin Gerwin, PhD – a specialist in sustainable development and deliberative democracy, coordinator of citizens' assemblies. A political science graduate, the topic of his doctoral dissertation focused on sustainable development in the context of global challenges. He is a co-founder of Sopotcka Inicjatywa Rozwojowa (Sopot Development Initiative), for many years engaged in the promotion of efficient democracy in Poland. He is an author of "*Żywność i demokracja*" ("Food and Democracy") and "*Żywność przyjazna dla klimatu*" ("Climate-friendly Food").