

Agenda-setting in Transnational and Global Citizens' Assemblies

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Preface

‘Why are we talking about this?’ is a simple yet profound question one can ask to any person involved in a citizens’ assembly. Often, the topic discussed in a citizens’ assembly is assumed to be relevant, if not urgent, in addressing collective problems. That may be the case. But who picked the topic? Why choose this topic over others? Who has the power to set the agenda in citizens’ assemblies?

Written by Canning Malkin, Franziska Maier, and Nardine Alnemr, this technical paper critically examines the process of agenda-setting in four cases of transnational and global citizens’ assemblies. The aim of this technical paper is to bring to light the overt and subtle factors that shape the process of defining the scope, remit, and topic of discussions in citizens’ assemblies and reflect on the implications of agenda-setting in the conduct and impact of citizens’ assemblies.

Readers of this technical paper are invited to take part in a reflective conversation on the ethics and politics of agenda-setting in citizens’ assemblies and, in so doing, generate actionable insights on how agendas of future citizens’ assemblies can be defined in a more inclusive and deliberative manner.

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Key Findings

This technical paper reviews the process of agenda-setting in transnational and global citizens' assemblies and presents recommendations for future assemblies. By agenda-setting, we refer to the process of identifying and selecting the topic of deliberation, developing the remit or framing question/s that provide structure to citizen deliberation, and setting parameters of relevant and marginal topics in the assembly. We selected four cases of transnational and global citizens' assemblies for this review:

1. European Citizens' Consultation (2006)
2. Conference of the Future of Europe (2021)
3. Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis (2021)
4. Global Citizens Assembly on Genome Editing (proposed).

Our key findings are as follows:

1. Agenda-setting holds considerable influence in the design and outcome of citizens' assemblies.
2. In transnational citizens' assemblies, agenda-setting is largely determined by actors who initiated or commissioned the assembly. These actors decide on the scope and remit of deliberation. They also set the terms of the decision-making process for selecting the agenda.
3. The breadth and scope of a citizens' assembly's agenda depends on its intended purpose or goals. In our analysis, we find that citizens' assemblies typically have three goals:
 - Policy goal, which is to integrate citizens' assemblies in the policymaking process to make the process more democratic.
 - Epistemic goal, which aims to capture citizens' considered judgment to inform collective decision-making.
 - Participatory goal, which demonstrates the role of deliberation in citizen-informed governance of complex issues.
4. Our respondents preferred to have a level of citizen input to agenda-setting. This includes deciding policy priorities, increasing the democratic quality of the agenda-setting process, and establishing the legitimacy of the assemblies. Constraints on funding, time, and capacity, however, require trade-offs between desirable design and impact.

These findings inform our recommendations for agenda-setting in global citizens' assemblies, as outlined in the next section.

Recommendations

We have four recommendations on how agenda-setting in transnational and global citizens' assemblies can be improved.

1. The breadth or specificity of a citizens' assembly's agenda should be in line with its intended goals. Assemblies with:
 - A policy goal need specific remits to allow citizens to make concrete recommendations.
 - An epistemic goal should have a broad remit to map citizens' concerns and priorities.
 - A participatory goal should strike a balance between broadness and specificity. The agenda should be focused enough so citizens can generate concrete recommendations but broad enough for citizens to negotiate the parameters of deliberation and define issues that matter to them.
2. Agenda-setting can be made more inclusive by creating mechanisms for Assembly Members to have input in identifying which issues or topics the assembly should focus on.
3. Agenda-setting can be more transparent by opening it up to the scrutiny of Assembly Members, process designers and implementers, as well as the wider public. Information on the following should be made publicly available:
 - How the agenda was set
 - The actors involved in agenda-setting, their interests, and priorities
 - The trade-offs in design due to the selected agenda (see recommendation 1)
 - Practical resource considerations, such as time and budget, that informed the scope of deliberation
4. The discussion on agenda-setting should be combined with the discussion on the citizens' assembly's intended impact. The framing of a citizens' assembly's agenda determines the kind of impact it will have and so actors in-charge of these two elements of a citizens' assembly require close coordination.

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Background and Approach

Organising citizens' assemblies begins with two questions: Who will be talking? What will they talk about?

The answer to the first question has been the topic of much discussion in the theory and practice of citizens' assemblies. The answer, put simply, is a representative sample of the wider population will be talking—selected through some form of civic lottery or sortition. What they will talk about, however, is another story. And it is a story that is often overlooked when we talk about citizens' assemblies.

This technical paper focuses on the process of agenda-setting in transnational citizens' assemblies. For deliberative democrats, transnational citizens' assemblies hold the promise of democratising global governance (Dryzek et al 2011). Infusing voices of everyday citizens in institutions of global governance have the potential to break political deadlocks and bring in more reflective thinking in a space that is largely defined by power politics. But what exactly everyday citizens talk about is, in itself, a manifestation of power politics. Who gets to define the topic of deliberation signals who has agenda-setting power in a supposedly democratic exercise. How the agenda is set, how the remit is framed, and how the scope of discussion is defined determine the relevance and ambition of a citizens' assembly. Agenda-setting controls what can and cannot be said in a citizens' assembly. It identifies which arguments and evidence are relevant, and which ones are not. The agenda is the north star for facilitators in group deliberations—it is their guide in steering deliberations to focus on the topic at hand. Agenda-setting, in other words, sets the context for the citizens' assembly. For all these reasons, it is important to take a deep dive into the process of agenda-setting in transnational citizens' assemblies and generate lessons for future assemblies.

To date, there is a limited number of cases of transnational and global citizens' assemblies. An OECD (2020) report finds that only 3% of representative deliberative processes are transnational or global in nature. Among the examples include European Citizens' Panel on the roles of rural areas (2006-2007), World Wide Views (WWViews) on Global Warming (2009), Citizens' Summit on Climate Change in the Baltic Sea Region (2011), WWViews on Biodiversity (2012), WWViews on Climate and Energy (2015), and the European Citizens' Panel on the Future of Europe (2018).¹

¹ OECD Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions (2021).

In this technical report, we focus on four cases of transnational and global citizens' assembly. We selected these cases to present a variety of commissioning contexts, scopes, and impacts:

1. European Citizens' Consultations (2006), commissioned by civil society to map citizens' perceptions of the European Union.
2. The Conference on the Future of Europe (2021), commissioned by the European Parliament, Commission, and Council to create a formal space for citizen contribution to EU policymaking.
3. The Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis (2021), commissioned by a consortium of civil society organisations and foundations to link citizens' recommendations to the UN Conference of Parties (COP26).
4. The Global Citizens' Assembly on Genome Editing (proposed)², initiated by a filmmaker and academic research centres to include citizens in the global dialogue about regulating genome editing.

We selected two cases of EU-wide assemblies to understand how assemblies directly inform political decision-making and hold the potential to be integrated into a relatively settled policy process at the EU level. Meanwhile, we selected two global assemblies, both of which aspire to provide a proof of concept that global citizen deliberation can democratise global governance on urgent issues such as climate change, and on issues that are at a turning point of global concern, such as genome editing.

² Note on the Global Citizens' Assembly on Genome Editing (GCA-GE): There are two-components to this project: (1) A global assembly of 100 citizens from five continents which has not been implemented yet; and (2) a series of national juries in Australia, Brazil and the UK which have been implemented as pilot of the assembly. Considering the ongoing status of this project, we report on agenda-setting as a whole but make important distinctions between the two components. References to 'the GCA-GE' is for the proposed project, while references to 'national GE juries' reports on relevant experiences from the pilot.

Research Findings

Our research on agenda-setting in transnational and global citizens' assemblies focused on three dimensions:

1. The context of commissioning the citizens' assembly
2. The scope of the remit
3. The desired impact of the citizens' assembly, including their connection to decision-making bodies

Overall, we find that the context of commissioning the citizens' assemblies, and the desired impact of citizens' assemblies influenced the assemblies' agendas. We will discuss each of these dimensions in turn.

1. Context of commissioning the citizens' assembly

Our first consideration in understanding the agenda-setting of citizens' assemblies is the context in which the assembly was established. We examined which actors initiated the assembly, the political conditions surrounding its establishment, and the design choices made at the outset.

We observed three priorities that defined the commissioning context of our four case studies.

1. Normative priority. The initiators and co-organisers of the citizens' assembly shared similar levels of interest in citizen input and engagement.
2. Political priority. The initiators and co-organisers of the citizens' assemblies prioritised finding ways to connect citizen voices to relevant political institutions or governance platforms, while at the same time, asserting independence from government bodies to establish these forums' legitimacy.
3. Strategic priority. The feasibility of implementing a transnational/global citizens' assembly depends on the initiators' and co-organisers' capacity for fundraising and garnering the support of organisations with an interest in either subject-matter governance issue, subject-matter

research, or the methods of citizen engagement and participation in policymaking and governance.

We present a brief about the commissioning context and these three priorities for each case.

1.1. The European Citizens' Consultation: A meta-agenda-setting process

A group of deliberative experts, advocates and foundations initiated the European Citizens' Consultation (ECC) after a project feasibility study was concluded in 2006 (Goldschmidt et al., 2008). The project was created in reaction to negative or misleading public perceptions of the EU in the media. The aim was to bridge the gap between citizens and political decisions. The initiating foundation, King Baudouin Foundation, secured political support and funding from the European Commission, and established a consortium of 40 charities and organisations to co-finance and lead the ECC.³ After funding was secured, the Foundation commissioned a team of deliberation experts to design and implement the ECC. As the political priority was secondary to the normative, our interviewees noted the challenges of not connecting the ECC panels to a political platform or policymakers.

Implementing the ideal of a citizen-led process, the ECC held an Agenda-Setting Event convening 200 randomly selected EU citizens over a weekend. Their deliberations were mainly guided by the question of how their daily lives were affected by the EU.⁴ Participants shared their experiences in small working groups. Facilitators and organisers of these working groups aggregated citizen deliberations into three policy concerns: Energy and Environment, Family and Social Welfare, and the EU's Global Role and Immigration. These policy issues became the three general discussion agendas for the National Citizens' Consultations, which took place in each member state after the Agenda-Setting Event. Moreover, citizens' juries were held to determine the informative material that would be presented to participants in the National Citizens' Consultations.⁵ The deliberations of the National Citizens' Consultations were guided by the question, "What is needed to achieve the Europe we want?". National Consultations were brought together into groups of five to share their findings and proposals transnationally.

1.2. The Conference on the Future of Europe: Institutional agenda-setting

³ See Participedia <https://participedia.net/case/4135>

⁴ <https://participedia.net/case/1105>

⁵ https://www.zsi.at/object/news/208/attach/1About_the_project_ECC_A.pdf

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE) was established through a Joint Declaration by the European Parliament, Council, and Commission in March 2021.⁶ With a focus on increasing the EU’s democratic legitimacy, the goal of the Conference was to “strengthen[sic] the link between Europeans and the institutions that serve them”.⁷ The Declaration outlines the basic governance structure of the Conference: the Executive Board comprised of leaders from each of the three institutions, responsible for high-level decisions and the Common Secretariat tasked with ensuring the representation of the three institutions. The Declaration also includes a commitment by the three institutions to follow up on the recommendations.⁸ Nevertheless, this structure did not facilitate the three institutions to collectively define their expectations and priorities. Agenda-setting, as a result, was lengthy and difficult. Ten policy issues were selected for deliberation:

1. Climate change and the environment
2. Health
3. Stronger economy, social justice and jobs
4. EU in the world
5. Values and rights
6. Rule of law, and security
7. Digital transformation
8. European democracy
9. Migration, education, culture, youth and sports
10. A broader category of ‘other’⁹

1.3. The Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis: Expert-led agenda-setting

The Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis (the GA) was mainly shaped by the organisers’ ambition to link a global citizens’ assembly to COP26. Conversations between the core organisers of the GA (which is a group of civil society and non-governmental organisations and foundations), social movements, and academics began in 2020. The organisers secured funding from Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK), Climate Emergency Collaboration Group, European Climate Foundation, One Project, and the Scottish Government a few months before the first GA session in October 2021.¹⁰

⁶ Engaging with citizens for democracy – Building a more resilient Europe.

⁷ See EUR-Lex - 32021C0318(01), 18.03.2021, accessible online at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021C0318%2801%29>

⁸ https://futureu.europa.eu/uploads/decidim/attachment/file/6/EN_-_JOINT_DECLARATION_ON_THE_CONFERENCE_ON_THE_FUTURE_OF_EUROPE.pdf

⁹ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20220509RES29121/20220509RES29121.pdf>

¹⁰ See Global Assembly Team (2022), <http://globalassembly.org>; N. Curato et al. (2023), Global Assembly

Agenda-setting in the GA was a collaborative effort between the core organisers and the Knowledge and Wisdom Advisory Committee (K&WC). The Committee was composed of nine academics tasked with overseeing the evidence presented to the Assembly Members.¹¹ Ahead of agenda-setting discussions with the K&WC, the core organisers conducted background research comparing framing questions set for climate citizens' assemblies in Europe. The K&WC met twice to decide on the framing questions of the national climate citizens' assemblies.

1.4. *The Global Citizens' Assembly on Genome Editing: Filmmaker-led agenda-setting*

The Global Citizens' Assembly on Genome Editing (GCA-GE) finds its origins as an opportunity to showcase the merits of citizen deliberation on ethically contentious global issues. At the 2018 International Summit on Human Genome Editing, Chinese scientist He Jiankui announced the birth of two babies who underwent his experiment for gene editing technology to prevent their risk of HIV infection. The announcement was controversial. He conducted the experiment against genetics regulation and without ethical oversight.

Following this controversy, Sonya Pemberton, a prize-winning science documentary filmmaker, made a closing comment at the Summit inviting experts to collaborate on projects to promote public engagement in genome editing. Pemberton initiated a collaboration between Genepool Productions, the Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance (University of Canberra), Centre for Law and Genetics (University of Tasmania), Wellcome Genome Campus (for the UK jury) and citizen participation organisations such as Mission Publiques and Involve UK.¹²

The initiating filmmaking and academic teams agreed to focus the agenda on 'human genome editing'.¹³ The national GE juries also consulted experts for agenda-setting, yet differently. For example, the Australian jury interviewed 34

Evaluation Report.

https://researchsystem.canberra.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/82182314/Global_Assembly_Evaluation_Report.pdf

¹¹ The nine members are: Dr Nafeez Ahmed, Dr Stuart Capstick, Prof. Purnamita Dasgupta, Prof. Saleemul Huq, Dr Jyoti Ma, Dr Mindahi Bastida Munoz, Prof. Michael Oti, Prof. Julia Steinberger, and Prof. Robert Watson.

¹² Global Citizens' Assembly on Genome Editing. Participedia. <https://participedia.net/case/7661>; also see UK citizens' jury on genome editing, Wellcome Connecting Science. <https://societyandethicsresearch.wellcomeconnectingscience.org/project/uk-citizens-jury-on-genome-editing/>

¹³ 'About', Global Citizens' Assembly on Genome Editing website (2019). Retrieved from Web Archive <https://web.archive.org/web/20210116212806/https://www.globalca.org/about>

experts, 14 from Australia and 20 from 10 countries.¹⁴ In comparison, the UK jury had experts on a separate four-members Oversight Group, which was tasked with agenda-setting.¹⁵ Nonetheless, Curato et al. (2022) reported low transparency and disclosure about the Oversight Group's discussions.

1.5. Commissioning contexts are key to understanding agenda-setting

Careful assessment of the initiating actors and the interplay between the normative, political, and strategic priorities explains the different approaches to agenda-setting. For example, ECC and CoFE have a similar purpose of creating spaces for citizen input into EU policy. However, their agenda-setting processes differed vastly. Executives in the EU set the agenda for the CoFE citizens' panels and online deliberations. The ECC, by contrast, as a collaboration between civil society organisations, had an opportunity for bottom-up agenda-setting. This was crucial for the ECC normative priority: to showcase, through deliberation, citizens' perceptions of the EU compared to the negative media representations.

The global assemblies, too, have a strong normative priority, but their strategic priority was equally important to their implementation. Both the GA and the GCA-GE relied on a network of interested actors with a capacity for funding or fundraising. The GA's core organising teams had existing connections to social movements such as Extinction Rebellion, experiences in designing and implementing national climate citizens' assemblies, and interest in showcasing the potential of 'scaling' these national experiences to the global level. Similarly, the collaborative dynamic in the GCA-GE depended on connections between interested actors that snowballed from Pemberton's call in 2018. In this case, the interested actors were specifically academics at the intersection of genetics regulation, citizen deliberation, and public engagement. In short, agenda-setting in both assemblies was shaped by a focus on their potential deliberative quality.

2. Scope of the remit

The scope of the framing questions or remit is integral to the intended impact of the assembly. Ultimately, it is the remit that directs citizen deliberations and proposals.

¹⁴ D. Nicol et al. (2022), Genome editing: formulating an Australian community response (Report to decision makers, stakeholders and members of the public). University of Tasmania https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1634258/OP12-final-report.pdf

¹⁵ Mark Bale (Department of Health and Social Care), Cath Joynson (Nuffield Council on Bioethics), Sarion Bowers (Wellcome Sanger Institute), and Nick Meade (Genetic Alliance UK).

We observed that the scope of the remit tends to align with the three types of goals as follows:

- Policy goals: Assemblies tend to have a specific or narrow remit.
- Epistemic goals: Assemblies tend to have a broad or guiding remit.
- Participatory goals: Assemblies tend to strike a balance between broadness and specificity.

2.1. The European Citizens' Consultations: Narrowed topics, broad questions

The 200 citizens in the ECC Agenda Setting Event decided on the agenda for the subsequent National Citizens' Consultations. During the event, citizens narrowed the initial scope to the three policy issues mentioned earlier.

Overall, the policy issues were limited, but the remit for each issue was not narrowed further in the National Consultations. This approach satisfied the normative priority of the project and also allowed for achieving the epistemic goal of mapping citizens' aspirations for future EU policy.

2.2. The Conference on the Future of Europe: Broadly-defined guiding principles

Citizens were included in two spaces: Citizens' Panels and a website called the Multilingual Digital Platform. The broadness of the question set by CoFE and the wide range of pre-selected policy issues allowed citizens to set the agenda amongst themselves. In the Panels, facilitators guided the participants to prioritise issues within their selected policy issue at the outset of the deliberations. Yet, this reduced the time available for deliberating on the material, with one out of three sessions dedicated to agenda-setting.

According to our interview partners, the Common Secretariat considered a more specific remit, but decided against it to avoid biasing the deliberations. While some interview partners appreciated this open-ended approach, which allowed participants to take charge of the agenda, other interview partners preferred narrower scopes that would have better guided the participants. Broad remits are problematic for organisers and initiators who prioritise the political relevance of a transnational citizens' assembly and its potential impact.

2.3. The Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis: A broad question to surface values in climate governance

Two considerations informed the GA's remit: previous examples of good framing questions and the policy impact of the assembly. For the first

consideration, the core organisers team prepared background research comparing the framing questions of previous national climate assemblies. Here, the core organisers identified Scotland's Climate Assembly as a starting benchmark: "How should Scotland change to tackle the climate emergency in an effective and fair way?". For the impact of deliberation, Sir Robert Watson, the K&WC Chair, centred the discussions about priorities and feasibility based on his experience in the IPCC and IPES.

Members of the K&WC considered framing questions that could interrogate systemic change and centre Indigenous knowledges. The Chair, however, advised against narrowing the scope to economic systems change, which other members argued is the root of the ecological crisis. Sir Watson called on the K&WC to prioritise impact, in terms of relevance to the "next ten years in climate governance", over presenting alternatives. Accepting the Chair's experience and advice, Watson redirected the group to formulate a remit that balances broadness and specificity to allow for deliberations at the values level. The final framing question was an adaptation of the Scottish example, "How can humanity address the climate and ecological crisis in a fair and effective way?".

2.4. *The Global Citizens' Assembly on Genome Editing: Narrower scope for a complex issue*

Pemberton, the filmmaker, set the initial scope to encompass three categories of genome editing applications: plants, animals, and humans, while academics from the Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance advised limiting the scope to primarily human genome editing. Like the consideration observed in the GA, a narrower scope reflects the deliberative quality of the remit, which is to surface values transferable to policymaking. The decision to narrow the scope required a compromise between the teams, particularly prioritising deliberative quality over the filmmaking storyline.

By comparison, the national GE juries had even narrower scopes. The Australian jury deliberated on the question: "Under what conditions (or circumstances) might the application of human genome editing technology be acceptable?". The UK jury followed the advice of the experts in Oversight Group to focus the question on "gene editing of human embryos with serious genetic conditions". Therefore, the scope of the remit in these three iterations differed based on whether the goal was focused on policy (Australian and UK Juries), or participatory and epistemic goals (GCA-GE).

3. The desired impact of the citizens' assembly, including their connection to decision-making bodies

The connection of the citizens' assembly to a political decision-making or governmental body is an important consideration in agenda-setting. It affects the perceived legitimacy of the assembly and potentially introduces changes to political decisions (if such a commitment is made). However, agenda-setting does not always centre impact, as discussed earlier. The four case studies show varied links to political and governance platforms, with relative strengths and limits.

3.1. The European Citizens' Consultations: The challenge of absent links to policymakers

The ECC was not connected to a political entity. Direct policy impact was not the purpose of the Conference. Instead, the organisers focused on demonstrating the feasibility and benefit of citizen deliberation to bring the EU closer to citizens by empowering them to consider political issues from a European perspective. Without constraints from political institutions, the organisers implemented their vision of an ideal design for citizen deliberation. However, the absence of a connection presents its own set of challenges.

3.2. The Conference on the Future of Europe: Commissioned by EU institutions

Commissioned by the three EU institutions, the CoFE was connected to decision-making bodies. As described above, the Executive Board decided on all high-level decisions. However, the three institutions had different goals for the remit of the conference: the European Parliament aimed for direct policy impact and potential constitutional reform, while the European Commission expected non-binding recommendations that could be integrated in the policymaking. The disagreement between the institutions created an ambiguity about the agenda (whether constitutional change is plausible) and bindingness (whether the recommendations would be for inspiration or direct recommendation).

3.3. The Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis: Docking to COP26

The GA mainly focused on “docking” the process to COP26. Independence from institutions of global governance was an important consideration for the organisers to ensure that the assembly reflects the participants' voices. Global governance conversations at this level are inaccessible to ordinary citizens.

Therefore, independence from national governments and international institutions demonstrated the GA's commitment to represent a global citizens' perspective on climate action. Considering a wider context where national climate citizens' assemblies are more frequent, the GA capitalised on arguments for citizen deliberation to strengthen its claims for impact. The outcome of this process is the People's Declaration for the Sustainable Future of the Planet Earth, delivered at COP26 in Glasgow.¹⁶

3.4. The Global Citizens' Assembly on Genome Editing: Citizens join the governance conversation

The proposed GCA-GE positions itself in global governance by tapping into arguments made by key international institutions about the importance of citizen inclusion in genome editing governance, e.g., the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Accordingly, the GCA-GE, particularly the documentary dimension of the project, linked to one of the UNESCO roundtables on the ethics of genome editing.¹⁷ Moreover, the tangible recommendations from national GE juries contrasted with simpler public engagement efforts by civil society organisations such as the Association for Responsible Research and Innovation in Genome Editing (ARRIGE) whose contribution is limited to a public website (Dryzek et al., 2020).

4. Power politics and constraints on agenda-setting

All four assemblies grappled with power politics and constraints relevant to their specific commissioning contexts. Funding is a common constraint for assemblies which are not commissioned by governmental bodies. Tensions about objectives and priorities between commissioning agencies can constrain citizens' assemblies, especially when commissioned by governmental bodies.

¹⁶ People's Declaration for the Sustainable Future of the Planet Earth, Global Assembly. <https://globalassembly.org/declaration>

¹⁷ See UNESCO, Roundtable on the Ethics of Genome Editing: Voice from Society (Multilingual version), March 12, 2021 [Video]. YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hG7cvPd3Xc>

The latter challenge was particularly the case for the CoFE, considering its close link to EU institutions. Background conflict between the three institutions disrupted the design and implementation of the assembly. The institutions did not have a shared position about the purpose, motivations, or priorities. The only common ground was to host a citizens' assembly. As discussed earlier, the result was a longer agenda-setting process than estimated by the institutions, the designers, and the facilitators. Many of our interview partners noted the knock-on effects of this split, e.g., lack of clarity about the goal of the assembly.

Power politics also constrained the agenda-setting for the GA and the GCA-GE (and national GE juries) despite not being commissioned by government institutions. The GA's ambition to be docked with COP26 required a level of alignment with the priorities set by COP. Such constrain can be seen in conversations about the framing questions to be pragmatic enough to be heard at COP26, as the Chair of the K&WC advised. Therefore, the GA's core organisers and K&WC had to compromise their aspiration to present alternatives not widely discussed or represented at COP. While the powerholders were not involved, the organisers had to make decisions that consider how the GA will be received by these powerholders. Similarly, successful fundraising depended on outreach to organisations with an interest in climate issues and governance. National GE juries were only possible after successful funding such as from the Australian Medical Research Future Fund¹⁸ and the Wellcome Connecting Science.¹⁹ As for the proposed GCA-GE to host 100 citizens from five continents, it is yet to materialise pending funding. Funders hold the power to select priority projects, which gives them power over agenda-setting—even if indirectly. With these constraints, global citizens' assemblies are neither entirely independent nor exempt from the constraints associated with the priorities and considerations of relevant powerholders.

Finally, the ECC might be a more optimistic example of cohesion between powerholders, organisers, and designers. Members of civil society undertook the project with a commitment to the participatory goal of demonstrating the usefulness of citizens' assemblies. As no government bodies were involved, ECC

¹⁸ D. Nicol et al. (2022), Genome editing: formulating an Australian community response (Report to decision makers, stakeholders and members of the public). University of Tasmania https://www.utas.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1634258/OP12-final-report.pdf

¹⁹ Wellcome Connecting Science (2022), Report of the UK Citizens Jury on Human Embryo Editing. <https://societyandethicsresearch.wellcomeconnectingscience.org/project/uk-citizensjury-on-genome-editing/>

process designers could implement ideas directly based on their normative convictions without the constraints of political negotiations. However, the lack of a connection between the assembly and political or governance platforms limited the impact of the ECC.

Table 1: Summary of the four case studies and their agenda-setting process

Case study	Commissioning context	Connection to ‘empowered spaces’ or decision-making bodies	Scope of the remit	Constraints on agenda-setting
European Citizens’ Consultations (2006)	Commissioned and organised by the King Baudouin Foundation and a network of partner organisations with some funding from the European Commission. The agenda was set through a democratised, meta-agenda-setting process to decide the topics of deliberation.	No connection to a political decision-making body. Despite financial support from the European Commission, neither the Commission nor any other governmental body made commitments by a political body to take up the ECC’s proposals.	The participants of the Agenda-Setting Event produced three topic areas that would be discussed in the subsequent National Assemblies: Energy and Environment, Family and Social Welfare, and the EU’s Global Role and Immigration. These three, therefore set parameters of deliberation on those topics, but participants could discuss what they wanted to within those topics.	Constraints on impact. There is no link or connection between empowered spaces and policymaking.
Conference on the Future of Europe (2021)	Commissioned by the European Parliament, Council and Commission. All top-level decisions were made by consensus between the institutions.	Directly linked to three European Union institutions as they were the commissioners. The assembly was to inform future policy agendas with a commitment by all institutions to be broadly responsive to proposals.	After extensive debate amongst the Executive Board, the representatives from the three EU institutions settled on the nine sub-topics to be discussed, including one further “Other” category.	Commissioning institutions lacked common purposes, motivations, and priorities, which affected the design and implementation of the assembly.
Global Citizens’ Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis (2021)	Organised and implemented by civil society groups, non-governmental organisations, and foundations with funding from different sources, including the Scottish Government. The agenda was set collaboratively by two	Timed with COP26 and secured a political opportunity to present at COP26 the output from the process: The People’s Declaration for the Sustainable Future of Planet	Members of the K&WC and the core organisers decided on a broad but contained question following the example of the question set in Scotland’s Climate Assembly.	The remit needed to align with dialogue at COP26 as well as funder subject-matter priority (i.e., climate governance).

	groups within the structure of the GA: the Knowledge and Wisdom Advisory Committee (K&WC) and the Central Circle.	Earth. Demands in the Declaration are non-binding.		
Global Citizens' Assembly on Genome Editing (ongoing)	Initiated by a filmmaking company, academic research centres, and, for some national GE juries, a foundation. The agenda was set through engagement with experts in genetics and genome editing either through interviews (Australian jury) or an oversight group (UK jury).	Positioned in the regulatory space to address demands about inclusion of citizens in genome editing governance, e.g., WHO, UNESCO and OECD.	After discussions between the filmmaking and academics teams to narrow the scope for 'genome editing' to 'human genome editing'. Some national GE juries with expert input narrowed to be specific e.g., 'conditions for human genome editing' and 'human embryos with serious genetic conditions.'	Constrained by funding availability and successful fundraising.

Open questions

In closing this technical paper, we highlight some questions based on two key findings: (1) Agenda-setting is closely linked to definitions of an assembly's impact, and (2) Agenda-setting involves compromises between actors which are manifest in design choices.

Across the four cases, our interview partners highlighted the importance of agenda-setting for guiding the involved actors just as much as giving direction for citizen deliberations to stay on course. For these reasons, development of agenda-setting should aspire to be democratic, inclusive, and impact-driven.

The following are questions relevant to researchers as well as initiators, commissioners, organisers, designers, and implementers of future transnational citizens' assemblies.

- **Levels of impact and agenda-setting**

We emphasised the interdependency between an assembly's intended impact and agenda-setting. Defining impact orients the actors involved to decide on an assembly's connection to empowered spaces and the scope of the remit.

- To what extent does the issue under deliberation affect its impact?
- How can assemblies move beyond showcasing the potential of deliberation to impact policymaking directly?
- How can the commissioning actors use agenda-setting to define impact more effectively?

- **Contentions in agenda-setting:**

The diversity of involved actors is associated with tensions from varied visions, objectives, and priorities. Other contentions are associated with the power and influence of commissioning actors, connections to political platforms or entities, and whether and which actors are willing to make compromises in the assembly design and implementation.

- Who should be included in agenda-setting to ensure the assemblies are representative?

- How can global citizens' assemblies ensure the inclusion of ordinary citizens in agenda-setting?
- Under power constraints of commissioning actors and funders, what are the features of a democratic agenda-setting process?

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