

Participatory and deliberative democracy briefing note from XR Cymru PE group requested by Julie James - December 2022

1. Grassroots level: community-led action to address the climate and nature emergency

1. We would like to harness the People's Assembly (PA) energy in Wales for grassroots activity. 'Community Assemblies' is an alternative term being used for local events. Events have been taking place on climate-related issues for some time, and experience and confidence is growing.
2. Funding for a template and training on PAs is needed to create trusted facilitators, organisers and experts; and for consistency of approach and skills. (SCCAN are working on something similar in Scotland [Training – Scottish Communities Climate Action Network & Transition Scotland Hub \(sccan.scot\)](#))
3. Consistency in organisation and process is needed as far as possible for comparable and meaningful results and measurable outcomes. Steps can be taken to help include as wide a range of people as possible, depending on the resources available to promote and support assemblies
4. We need to help manage PAs as a process, i.e. a series of meetings rather than a one-off event. This gives communities a chance to consider what they want to address, decide what input they need to learn about it, and then go on to make decisions / take action
5. PAs should focus mainly on local responses and actions, but may also send messages to national or local governments in terms of solutions and best practice development.
6. There are already lots of examples in Wales of PAs, e.g. Brecon , Machynlleth, Pembrokeshire, Denbigh, Aberystwyth and elsewhere. [Closing the democracy gap in Wales, bottom up and top down \(foodsociety.wales\)](#)
7. PAs can be carried out in partnership with a range of organisations. GwyrddNi have an exciting programme of Assemblies in Gwynedd using a model that includes community organising and a level of basic sortition that may be replicable across Wales, given the right level of resourcing.

8. The topic for deliberation must be generated from the community, rather than any external body, albeit an external facilitator can help refine to make the process feasible.

2. National or local government level climate assemblies: organised / commissioned by governance organisations to inform policy-making

1. We advocate for Citizens' Assemblies - now often called Climate Assemblies (CAs) - to focus on difficult or intransigent national policy issues, and to assist politicians in making long term assessments and decisions. It is possible this may not be applicable for every policy area, e.g. national security issues.
2. Deliberative democracy can be through Citizens' Assemblies or Citizens' Juries depending on their size and role. Standards are set by recognised independent bodies, encompassing the following values: independence, social justice, inclusion, accountability, transparency
3. Sortition processes are used to guarantee that hard to reach groups are represented.
4. Whilst Citizens' Assemblies / Citizens' Juries have been used to tackle action on climate change as a whole, they can also be used to address specific aspects of it, such as travel, home heating or food. Experience is beginning to show that generalised questions may be less effective than more specific ones in producing clear recommendations. XR Cymru submitted a proposal to the Welsh Government for a Citizens' Assembly on transport / travel in February of this year.
5. The framing of the question and how it is approached has been the subject of much research and is crucial to the robustness of the outcome. The Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies - KNOCA - is tracking climate assemblies Europe-wide and gathering very valuable experience and research as assemblies are completed. <https://knoca.eu> Research specifically comparing the UK and France climate assemblies has been undertaken by CAST: <https://cast.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CITIZENS-CLIMATE-ASSEMBLIES-CAST-July-2021.pdf>
6. KNOCA is also developing a knowledge-base on the different and varied ways that climate assemblies are funded and organised. They are looking

at how citizens are selected to participate; how experts are selected and deployed to inform the participants; and how much the involved citizens can direct and determine how they consider the topic under discussion. They are also looking at governance issues and how climate assembly recommendations and conclusions are formed, disseminated and acted on.

3. Capacity-building for participatory democracy

National exercises in deliberative democracy should be viewed as a key investment in helping secure the progress we all know is essential. They offer value for money and potential for Welsh people and wildlife to thrive longer term rather than being viewed as an unaffordable short term expense.

1. Deliberative processes definitely need to be properly resourced, and participants and organisers recompensed. However, there may be economies of scale if Wales develops its own capacity to facilitate and organise People's /Community Assemblies, Citizens' Assemblies or Citizens' Juries.
2. Consideration could be given to developing either a new, or an existing, organisation based in Wales to support deliberative democracy.
3. The potential to attract external funding (eg National Lottery) could bring more resources into Wales.
4. A Wales-wide organisation would avoid duplication, share knowledge and give support. It would avoid the situation of each group working in isolation with varying standards and principles.
5. A deliberative democracy proposal to address climate change could be led / endorsed by the politicians.
6. An in-Wales resource offers the possibility of a continuing process.
7. Experience of digital assemblies is developing and should be considered for all or part of any process.

4. Proposals:

- To consider the feasibility of commissioning several deliberative processes as a nation / group of local authorities if similar events were held. This could lead to shared costs or economies of scale.

- To consider whether a group of people in Wales, perhaps based on an existing not-for-profit organisation, could be skilled up as a participatory democracy resource for Wales.
- To seek UK wide funding, thereby bringing additional resources into Wales rather than depleting Government funds.
- To organise one or more learning events for Senedd Members and staff on the way forward.