Deliberative Integrity

Deliberative Integrity Indicators: Some Insights from Participedia

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Problem

The gain in popularity of deliberative mini-publics means they face increasing challenges to integrity, such as poor organisation, vulnerability to manipulation or co-optation. We need a benchmark, a set of indicators upon which we can assess and improve the integrity of deliberative mini-publics. But what are these indicators? How do we establish them?

Purpose

In this research note, we turn to Participedia—an online platform used to document the practices of participatory processes around the world, including deliberative mini-publics—to search for indicators of deliberative integrity. Focusing particularly on the Australian mini-publics documented on this platform (19 analysed to date), we seek to deepen our understanding of deliberative integrity.

Approach

Our approach is inductive. We read and scrutinise each case carefully with the sight to understand what might enhance or constrain the integrity of deliberative mini-publics. Based on this close reading, we identify a preliminary set of deliberative integrity indicators and compare these to the indicators featured in the 2021 OECD evaluation framework.

Findings

We suggest dividing the deliberative integrity indicators into three different phases of deliberative mini-publics: pre-deliberative, during the deliberative process and post-deliberative. We present

what each indicator encompasses, including links to practical examples where they manifest or are lacking.

Value

These preliminary insights may help researchers, practitioners and participants to further reflect on the integrity of the deliberative mini-publics they are organising and/or a part of.

Introduction

Deliberative mini-publics are increasingly being used for public decision-making, and used as a tool by governments for more direct citizen input into issues that impact them. As deliberative mini-publics continue to gain traction around the world, they require further scrutiny. Having a mini-public in place does not necessarily make governments or societies more democratic. Similar to any other democratic innovations, mini-publics are vulnerable to manipulation or co-optation. We need a benchmark, a set of indicators upon which we can assess and improve the integrity of these valuable processes. But what are these indicators? How do we establish them? How can the deliberative integrity of mini-publics be monitored and improved? These are some questions we ask as part of our broader research project 'Monitoring Deliberative Integrity in Australia'.

As part of this project and to better understand what could be considered deliberative integrity indicators, we conducted a preliminary inductive analysis of Australian mini-public cases as recorded on Participedia. Participedia is a global crowdsourcing platform about democratic participation and innovations that anyone can access and contribute to. It can also be used for research purposes, especially for qualitative comparison and evaluation of different cases (Parry and Ercan 2020).

In this research note, we present preliminary insights from a close, inductive analysis of 19 Australian mini-publics documented on Participedia with the aim of identifying and unpacking what may count as a deliberative integrity indicator in practice. We limited our analysis to Australian mini-publics as monitoring deliberative integrity in Australia is one of the key purposes of our Deliberative Integrity project.

In what follows, we will outline each of the deliberative integrity indicators we have identified through our inductive analysis of 19 Participedia cases and indicate which phase they fit into within the deliberative process.

It is important to note that this analysis is still taking place, therefore the findings in this research note are relevant at the time of publication but will likely be refined through further analysis and review. Subsequent research notes and publications will include more up-to-date findings.

Insights from Participedia: An inductive analysis of Australian mini-publics

Based on our inductive analysis of Australian mini-publics cases as recorded on Participedia, we think it makes sense to distinguish between three different phases of deliberative mini-publics. In Table 1, we list what we think are crucial for deliberative integrity for each phase. Some indicators, such as publicity is relevant across all phases of deliberative mini-publics.

Table 1 - Deliberative Indicators

Pre-Deliberative Process	During Deliberative Process	Post-Deliberative Process
Funding of process	Neutrality of facilitation	Consequentiality
Fair process of recruitment	Inclusion of diverse information sources	Accountability to other citizens
Clear and suitable purpose of process	Transparency of process	
Clear understanding of process by participants	Sufficient time for deliberation	
Transparency of process	Process of producing final report	

Publicity	Publicity	Publicity
	Establishment of oversight board	
	Accountability to other citizens	

In the following section, we will outline what each of the indicators encompass, including links to empirical examples where they manifest or are lacking, highlighting the need for them to be there.

Pre-deliberative Process

1. **Funding of the process** (*Who funds the process?*)

   This is a crucial integrity indicator. In the cases analysed, the mini-publics were funded by local government, with state or territory government funding cases as applicable. One [federal case](#) analysed, although it did not go ahead, would have been funded by federal government.

2. **Recruitment** *(Is it a fair process?)*

   There are variations in the way participants are recruited to participate in deliberative mini-publics. A fair and transparent recruitment process is key for deliberative integrity. In most cases this is done through randomised stratified sampling. Some cases also had incentives for participating, such as going in a [prize draw](#).

3. **Clear and suitable purpose of the process** *(Does the process have a clear and suitable purpose?)*

   This is an important indicator, also used by the [OECD](#) to evaluate deliberative processes.

   In the cases we looked at, to various extents, the purpose and parameters for deliberation was set by the government. Some cases allowed for greater "room" in deliberation (e.g. [Geelong Citizens' Jury](#) in 2016 where jurors were tasked with providing both practical and aspirational recommendations for how they would like to be democratically represented),

while others were much more specific (e.g. Reid Highway Extension Citizens' Jury in 2001 to help decide where to place a contentious local highway).

It was mostly clear and remained so for the duration of the process. However, in the case of the Reid Highway Extension, deliberation allowed citizens to reframe the issue from what the government initially thought was about communities not wanting the highway in their suburb, to an issue of safety. The issue was then addressed from that perspective.

4. **Clear understanding of process by participants** *(Do participants understand the deliberative process and what they are asked to do in the time?)*

There have been a few cases that explicitly state that jurors/mini-public participants received an introduction to critical thinking (e.g. Hervey Bay Esplanade Community Engagement), with some also including brief training in bias and various approaches to problem solving (e.g. Gender Equality Citizens' Jury).

In one of the analysed cases (Infrastructure Victoria Engagement Process), it was noted that there were some issues around understanding the deliberative process, which may have added to feelings of under-representation by rural communities in this case.

5. **Transparency of process** (*Is the process opened up to the broader public?*)

Multiple cases involved community consultation (e.g. consultations, surveys, public submissions, "town hall" deliberations public could attend) before set deliberation times to create a better understanding of the issue and to provide jurors with information to consider. The SA case on nuclear fuel incorporated state-wide public consultation in the deliberative process for the second citizens' jury to incorporate into government recommendations.

6. **Publicity** (*How about the media coverage of the process?*)

Media coverage, and the relationship between the organisers of deliberative mini-publics and the media outlets seem to play a crucial role. One case (Federal citizens' assembly in climate change policy) did not go ahead due to negative media coverage of it in its planning stages. In the case of Get to Know Nuclear: Nuclear Fuel Cycle Engagement in South Australia, it was noted that media coverage before participant recruitment may have caused more anti-nuclear people to want to take part in deliberation.

During Deliberative Process

7. **Neutrality of facilitation** *(Who is the facilitator?)*

   In the Australian mini-public cases we examined, facilitators were predominantly trained and involved third parties facilitating deliberation, such as [MosaicLab](#), [newDemocracy Foundation](#), 21st Century Dialogue, [Straight Talk – now operating as RPS](#), and [democracyCo](#). Academics were also involved in the formation and facilitation for some cases.

8. **Inclusion of diverse information sources** *(What information is provided to the participants?)*

   There are different sources of information noted in the cases. In the cases we analysed, information provision mainly took the form of experts (sometimes the jurors could elect the experts), written information, input from broader community, local knowledge relevant to the issue, and site visits. On some occasions, jurors sought their own information sources prior to deliberation (e.g. [Reid Highway Extension Citizens' Jury](#)). In a couple of analysed cases, consideration of what other overseas jurisdictions, either through deliberative participants' lived experiences in other countries (e.g. [Sunbury's Water Future Community Panel](#)) or through case studies (e.g. [Gender Equality Citizens' Jury](#)), was also a source of information for consideration.

   The [Gender Equality Citizens' Jury](#) case highlighted the challenge of presenting diverse perspectives through expert presentations, with the three presenters all being in favour of gender quotas. Jurors commented that this meant a biased perspective, however, the appendix of the jury report listed all the invited speakers, their (varied) perspectives on the issue, and why they could not attend the deliberation day.

9. **Transparency of process** *(Is the processes opened up to the broader public?)*

   The transparency of the process varies across different cases. It happens in various ways, such as through media coverage, online platforms for broader public to contribute during

deliberation process, making draft plans available to public for community feedback, releasing periodic reports that were updated as broader community responded.

One good example is how [Greater Geraldton Deliberative Participatory Budgeting](#) opened jury recommendations for community feedback via social media, as well as publishing information in the local newspaper.

10. **Sufficient time for deliberation** *(Do participants have enough time to reach a well-considered result? Is there room for flexibility in the process to achieve this?)*

    Time allocated for deliberation seems to be an important issue. While most cases had set times, the [Geelong Citizens' Jury](#) showed the importance of flexibility in this process and an extra day for deliberation to not rush to consensus. They also held an optional debrief session to close off the jury process, which included follow-up and information of other deliberation opportunities for jurors to engage in.

    Some cases (e.g. [ACT Compulsory Third Party Insurance Citizens' Jury, Gender Equality Citizens' Jury](#)) also acknowledged jurors commenting they would have liked more time to deliberate.

    There was one case ([Nillumbik Shire Community Panel](#)) where panellists left halfway through the process because they did not think their input was needed, but then returned for the final deliberation. This could illustrate the necessity of being flexible in the process but this needs further evaluation, as this specific case had a few issues with it.

11. **Process of producing final report** *(Who produces the final report? How much time is allowed?)*

    The final recommendations/jury report is usually drafted on the last day or meeting.

    The final policy report was often left to government officials, who would usually change the wording of recommendations for the final reports while remaining as true to viable recommendations as possible.

Nillumbik Shire Community Panel (2018) illustrated the complexity of producing final reports as factions were formed and some panellists wrote their own minority report (before voting was complete and without knowledge of facilitators and organisers) that other panellists were unaware of until they saw it included in the final report. The council, however, did not accept this report because of this.

12. **Publicity** *(What, if any, publicity is taking place during the process?)*
Often included sharing of ideas that were being deliberated for community feedback during process, as in the case of Greater Geraldton Deliberative Participatory Budgeting.

13. **Establishment of oversight board** *(Is there an oversight board?)*

Some cases had an oversight group to oversee the operations of deliberations, such as the Deliberative Participatory Budgeting in Greater Geraldton's Independent Review Committee. These boards often consisted of stakeholders, such as prominent community members and/or government officials.

14. **Accountability to other citizens** *(What, if anything, is done to make the process accountable to other citizens?)*

This happened in various ways in a few cases, such as through deliberation in a town hall where the public could attend (City of Canada Bay Citizens' Panel), making draft recommendations open to public for feedback via social media or local media (Greater Geraldton Deliberative Participatory Budgeting), or by periodically releasing reports for public feedback (Infrastructure Victoria Engagement Process).

Post-deliberative Process

15. **Publicity** *(If and how is information of the process and outcomes made available to the public?)*

Completed and accepted reports were usually published on the funding government's website. The third-party facilitators will also usually have information or references to the processes they were a part of on their websites. Most cases also have video summaries (on the funder's website) of the deliberation that include interviews with participants.

16. **Consequentiality** *(What, if any, actions or outcomes did the deliberative process lead to?)*

In most cases, the funding government at least considered proposals but often also implemented viable recommendations. This included adopting the recommended decision ([Reid Highway Extension Citizens' Jury](#)), using the recommendations to inform policies or plans ([Greater Geraldton Deliberative Participatory Budgeting](#), [Future Melbourne 2026 citizens' jury](#)), improving government understanding of community's perspective of issue ([Infrastructure Victoria Engagement Process](#)), and the introduction and passing of bills ([ACT Compulsory Third Party Insurance Citizens' Jury, Gender Equality Citizens' Jury](#)).

17. **Accountability to other citizens** *(What, if anything, is done to make the process accountable to other citizens?)*

This is not very clear in the cases analysed as yet. For post-deliberative processes, this might be better seen in initiatives that acted as a continuation of previous deliberative approaches, as they would have incorporated lessons learned from the first process. This may be seen in one of the future cases to be analysed, specifically the Infrastructure Victoria's Engagement Process that undergoes updates approximately every 3-5 years, with the recent update process undertaken in 2020.

What this means and next steps

These indicators provide us with initial insight into deliberative integrity in the deliberative process. We will continue to analyse Australian mini-public cases, giving priority to recent cases (i.e., in the past five years) to further refine these indicators and in due time publish updates to these findings.

List of analysed deliberative Australian mini-public cases on Participedia

1. [Reid Highway Extension Citizens' Jury (2001)](#)
2. [Fremantle Bridge Community Engagement Process (2006)](#)
3. [Proposed Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change Policy (2010)](#) – did not go ahead
4. [City of Canada Bay Citizens' Panel on Council Services (2012)](#)
5. [Greater Geraldton Deliberative Participatory Budgeting (2013-2014)](#)
6. [Campaspe: Our Future (2014)](#)
7. [Future Melbourne 2026 Citizens' Jury (2016)](#)
8. [Infrastructure Victoria Engagement Process (2016)](#)
9. [Geelong Citizens' Jury (2016)](#)
10. [Get to Know Nuclear: Nuclear Fuel Cycle Engagement in South Australia (2016)](#)
11. [ACT Compulsory Third Party Insurance Citizens' Jury (2017-2018)](#)
12. [Staying on Track Youth Jury (2018)](#)
13. [Nillumbik Shire Community Panel (2018)](#)
14. [Palmerston Community Plan (Aug 2018-2019)](#)
15. [Gender Equality Citizens' Jury (2018)](#)
16. [Hervey Bay Esplanade Community Engagement (Dec 2018-2019)](#)
17. [Transport Network Pricing Community Panel (2019)](#)
18. [Sunbury's Water Future Community Panel (2019)](#)
19. [South Australia's Youth Action Plan (2019)](#)

References

OECD (2021). *Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes*. OECD.

Parry, Lucy J. and Ercan, Selen A. (2020). "Using Participedia to study the impacts of mini-publics." Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance Working Paper 2020/02. Canberra, Australia: Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance.

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