

Institution: University of Westminster		
Unit of Assessment: 19 Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Citizens' Assemblies: Impacting on Design and Practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014 – 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Graham Smith	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Politics and Director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: Since November 2012
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 – Dec 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y/N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Professor Graham Smith is an internationally renowned researcher on citizens' assemblies. His research has had significant direct impact on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The design and implementation of citizens' assemblies at the national and local level in the UK; • Parliamentarians seeking to implement a citizens' assembly on Brexit; • The design and implementation of the world's first permanent citizens' dialogue adopted by the Parliament of the German-Speaking community in Belgium; • The capacity of the direct action movement Extinction Rebellion to articulate its demand for a citizens' assembly on climate and ecological justice; • The content of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill and the Today For Tomorrow campaign. 		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Graham Smith is recognised in academic and practitioner circles as a world-leading expert in the study of democratic innovations: new forms of engaging citizens in political decision-making. His research in this area is widely acknowledged as central to the establishment of democratic innovations as a legitimate field of study within political science (Elstub and Escobar 2019: 12). Smith has a particular specialism in the design and application of citizens' assemblies, which bring together a randomly-selected group of between 50 to 150 citizens to learn, discuss and come to judgements on a pressing political issue. The first citizens' assembly took place in Canada in 2005. The model gained more widespread attention when it was used in Ireland in 2016 to 2018 to break political deadlock on constitutional issues such as abortion.</p> <p>Citizens' assemblies are part of a broader family of "deliberative mini-publics" (DMPs) that combine random selection and facilitated deliberation. Smith's innovative research has clarified the distinctive design characteristics of DMPs, distinguishing this institutional form from other approaches to participatory governance [1]. He has articulated the significant differences within type (e.g. between citizens' assemblies, citizens' juries, deliberative polls, etc.) and clarified the contested functions that DMPs can play within democratic political systems [2]. His research makes explicit the importance of design choices. Drawing on the historical use of sortition (selection by lot) in ancient Athens and in the contemporary practice of DMPs, he has shown the critical importance of combining random selection with clear mandate and regular rotation of membership if DMPs are to be institutionalised effectively [3]. Smith has also made the innovative argument for integrating citizens' assemblies with independent offices for future generations as a way of ameliorating endemic short-termism in democratic politics [4].</p> <p>Smith has undertaken ground-breaking practice-based research to show that citizens' assemblies could be used effectively within the UK political system. Drawing on his research on DMPs in other advanced industrial democracies (e.g. Australia, Canada, Ireland, United States), Smith has been a co-investigator on two major ESRC projects. The first, Democracy Matters, organised two citizens' assemblies on devolution in the Solent and South Yorkshire regions. This project tested variations in design, specifically the effect of including local councillors alongside randomly selected citizens in the composition of the assembly. The project provides systematic evidence of the way in which the inclusion of politicians can have an effect on agenda-setting and deliberation [5]. The project won the UK Political Studies Association's 2016 Democratic Innovations Award for its "innovative and deliberative" approach and "potential for shaping future</p>		

democratic reforms and the devolution of power at local and regional level". The second project, Citizens' Assembly on Brexit (CAB), took place in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum and tasked participants with considering the UK's trading relationship with the EU and its future immigration policy. The CAB provides robust evidence of the importance of using attitudinal criteria in the recruitment of participants (in this case, the Brexit vote) alongside more traditional socio-demographic criteria to avoid skewing membership. It also provides further evidence of the capacity of citizens to deliberate on highly contentious and complex policy issues. The design of the CAB shows the effectiveness of prioritising the role of professional facilitation over leadership by an appointed high-profile chair, as had been the case in the Democracy Matters pilots and previous citizens' assemblies in Canada and Ireland [6].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] Ryan, M. and Smith, G. 2014. "Defining Mini-Publics," in: Kimmo Grönlund, André Bächtiger, and Maija Setälä (ed.) *Deliberative Mini-Publics: Involving Citizens in the Democratic Process*. Colchester: ECPR Press: 9-26. Google Scholar [GS] Citations: 95 (31/12/20)
- [2] Setälä, M. and Smith, G. 2018. "Mini-publics and deliberative democracy," in: Bächtiger, A., Dryzek, J., Mansbridge, J. and Warren, M.E. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. GS Citations: 43 (31/12/20)
- [3] Owen, D. and Smith, G. 2018. "Sortition, Rotation and Mandate: Conditions for Political Equality and Deliberative Reasoning," *Politics and Society*. 46 (3): 419-434. Peer reviewed.
- [4] Smith, G. 2019. "Enhancing the Legitimacy of Offices for Future Generations: The Case for Public Participation," *Political Studies*. 68 (4): 996-1013. Peer reviewed.
- [5] Flinders, M., Ghose, K., Jennings, W., Molloy, M., Prosser, B., Renwick, A., Smith, G., and Spada, P. 2016. *Democracy Matters: Lessons from the 2015 Citizens' Assemblies on English Devolution*. London: Electoral Reform Society, Constitution Unit. 78 pp.
- [6] Renwick, A., Allan, S., Jennings, W., McKee, R., Russell, M., and Smith, G. 2017. *A Considered Public Voice on Brexit: The Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit*. London: Constitution Unit. 86 pp.

Grants

- ESRC, 'Democracy Matters: A Constitutional Assembly for the UK – A Comparative Study and Pilot Project', ESRC Urgency Grant [ES/N006216/1](#), PI Matthew Flinders (University of Sheffield), £160,487, 01/09/2015 to 31/08/2016.
- ESRC, 'Citizens' Assembly on Brexit', [ES/R000867/1](#), PI Alan Renwick (UCL), £241,820, 01/04/2017 to 31/12/2017.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

(1) Impact on the Delivery of Citizens' Assemblies in the UK

The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit (CAB) pilot project, organised by Smith and colleagues, has **played a critical role in the application of citizens' assemblies in the UK at both national and local levels.**

At the national level. Tim Hughes, Director of the participation charity Involve, states that **the CAB provided a "proof of concept... very important for the development of Citizens' Assemblies in the UK"** [1a]. In the wake of the CAB, UK parliamentary committees commissioned two high-profile citizens' assemblies to inform their inquiries: the Citizens' Assembly on Social Care (CASC) in 2018 and the Climate Assembly UK (CAUK) in 2020. Both assemblies were delivered by Involve, and Hughes is clear that **these national CAs would not have happened without the earlier CAB**: "there is a clear chain from the Brexit one happening to the social care one happening and being possible... The climate one wouldn't be happening without the social care one" [1a]. Hughes further confirms that the proof of concept provided by CAB "was incredibly helpful in having conversations with first the Clerks and then the Chairs of the Committees in Parliament... it helped to give them confidence that this has been done before, that there is a clear process that is tried and tested on the most contested topic of the time", and "it has helped us set the agenda in a way that would have been much harder without doing it" [1a]. Drawing on insights from his research (especially output [3]), Smith's advice on organising the CAUK into sub-assemblies to deal with the complexity of climate policy was adopted in its

final design. The CAUK also integrated an attitudinal criterion (concern about climate change) into its recruitment process, directly drawing from the practice of the CAB [1a].

Secondary impacts of these national CAs can be clearly discerned. For example, Clive Betts MP, Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, and Sarah Wollaston MP, Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee (MHCLG), are clear that “using a Citizens’ Assembly [CASC] helped their committees find a consensus and produce a unanimous joint report for their recent [2018] inquiry into the long-term funding of adult social care, in an important innovation in select committee practice” [1b]. The recommendations of CAUK, published in September 2020, received significant media coverage and have already been used by the UK Committee on Climate Change to shape the UK’s Sixth Carbon Budget, launched in December 2020. As the Committee states: “The UK Climate Assembly provided useful insights on the priorities of a representative cross-section of the UK population. These priorities are reflected in this report” [1c, p.24]. For instance, its net zero pathway “[i]s designed to be delivered in a way that works for people – reflects their priorities and choices, and aligns very well to the preferences expressed by the Climate Assembly [CAUK], which was called by six Select Committees of the House of Commons to understand public views on how the UK should tackle climate change” [1c, p.49].

At the local level: Miriam Levin, former Head of Community Action at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS), confirms that Smith’s work was **critical in obtaining government funding for, and determining the design of, the DCMS and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s (MHCLG) Innovation in Democracy programme** [1d], which ran from November 2018 to March 2020. Regarding government investment into this programme, Levin writes: “The Citizens’ Assembly on Brexit and Democracy Matters (DM) assemblies demonstrated that the methodology could be used to enable ordinary people to work through the most contentious issues to reach a consensus on the way forward. It gave me as a policymaker proof of concept, and the ability to convince junior ministers and Secretaries of State in DCMS and MHCLG to back and fund the trial of citizens’ assemblies” [1e]. The funding enabled three local authorities to commission citizens’ assemblies, and Levin notes: **“The model of citizens’ assemblies as successfully demonstrated by CAB and DM formed the basis for the design of the Innovation in Democracy assemblies.** We drew heavily on their best practice, including appointing independent facilitators, running the assemblies over two full weekends and paying honorariums to the participants” [1e], elements specified in research outputs [5] and [6].

(2) Advising UK Parliamentarians on Appropriate Use of Citizen Assemblies

Neal Lawson, Executive Director of Compass, a leading UK political think tank, states that Smith should be credited for his “impact on the nature of the national political discourse around developing democracy, because if [he] hadn’t done all of that work and had all of those insights we wouldn’t be anywhere near the conversations we are now having on new forms of deliberative democracy” [2a]. In particular, Smith has worked to **ensure citizens’ assemblies are not misused, thus safeguarding their continued viability in political discourse and action.**

Inspired by the CAB pilot project, in 2018-19, in the run up to the parliamentary vote on the Brexit withdrawal agreement, a number of parliamentarians, led by Stella Creasy MP, Lisa Nandy MP and Caroline Lucas MP, made the case publicly for a government-commissioned citizens’ assembly on Brexit [2b]. Their argument was that the Brexit referendum gave no indication of what Brexit should look like. Smith spoke at private parliamentary briefings and a full-capacity meeting in Parliament alongside Creasy, Nandy and Lucas. The level of understanding amongst parliamentarians about citizens’ assemblies was low and as Lawson, one of the campaign organisers states, the “reassurance, particularly of an academic who doesn’t have an axe to grind on this, was absolutely essential” [2a]. Smith agreed to join a select number of high-profile individuals, including Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams and then Senior Rabbi to Reform Judaism Laura Janner-Klausner, in signing a widely reported letter in *The Guardian* in support of the idea of a Brexit assembly [2c]. However, when it became clear that a significant extension to Article 50 would not be forthcoming, Smith was part of the group, including colleagues from the Citizens’ Assembly on Brexit project (from UCL Constitution Unit and Involve), that **persuaded these MPs not to move forward with the Brexit citizens’ assembly proposal.** A robust and independent assembly would require months of organisation to recruit

members and provide the space for deliberation and time for parliament to consider recommendations. The political conditions were not favourable for such a process and Smith and colleagues were able to convince the parliamentarians to avoid delivering a citizens' assembly that did not meet the appropriate standards [2a].

(3) Impact on the Design of the Permanent Citizens' Dialogue, Belgium

The reach of Smith's impact is evidenced by his "instrumental" role in **the design of the world's first permanent Citizens' Dialogue based on random selection** established by the Parliament of the German-speaking community of Belgium [3a, 3b]. Smith was invited by the G1000 Foundation in Belgium to be part of a three-day international expert design workshop that had been commissioned by the Parliament to consider how best to integrate a permanent mechanism to integrate citizens' assemblies into its work. The proposal generated by the expert design team was adopted unanimously by Parliament without revision on 25th February 2019 and was implemented later that year [3b].

The final design of the Citizens' Dialogue draws explicitly on Smith's research on the importance of combining random selection with a clear mandate that distinguishes between tasks of agenda-setting and scrutiny and features regular rotation of membership (research output [3]). Smith's central role in establishing these novel design features is confirmed by Yves Dejaeghere, one of the G1000 convenors: "we had the idea of a single second chamber, which would have people sitting for two years or longer", however a "lot of the **questioning from Graham Smith... going back to the experience he had... made us change that idea**. So, it avoided us going down a direction that I think now would have been a much less appropriate design" [3b]. Dejaeghere adds: "how the decision process is made to set the agenda, all these things were designed in the Bill with the help of... Graham Smith" [3b].

The Citizens' Dialogue is constituted by a permanent Citizens' Council of 24 randomly selected citizens who have taken part in previous citizens' assemblies. Its membership is regularly rotated with 8 members being replaced every six months. The Council takes on the agenda-setting role, taking evidence from parliament, government and civil society and deciding independently on which issues should then be scrutinised by citizens' assemblies. Parliament and government are required to respond publicly to recommendations from assemblies within 6 months. The Citizens' Council met for the first time in September 2019 and established its first citizens' assembly on employment in social care in early 2020.

The novel design of the Ostbelgien process is **widely acclaimed as a "trailblazer" in the politics of citizens' assemblies** [3c] and has received extensive international interest from publications including *The Economist*, *El Pais* and *Der Spiegel* [3d]. *The Economist* referred to the dialogue as an innovation "that Aristotle would have approved of" [3e].

(4) Pedagogical Impact on Extinction Rebellion

A key demand of Extinction Rebellion (XR) is the establishment of a national citizens' assembly on the climate and ecological emergency. XR reached out to Smith to help activists think through what this would mean in practice. Smith has provided ongoing advice and support, including the organisation of three days of design workshops in the first half of 2019 at the University of Westminster, where academic and practical experts in citizens' assemblies worked with XR activists.

A member of the XR Citizens' Assembly (XRCA) Working Group explains how Smith has **enabled XR to be clearer about its demands and expectations of the citizens' assembly process**: "Before these workshops I don't think any of us had any idea of how in practice the CA for Climate and Ecological Justice was going to work... It gave us the knowledge and confidence we needed to properly communicate with a wider audience about citizens' assemblies" [4a]. The former convenor of the XRCA working group adds that such knowledge has been "conveyed to MPs on several different occasions, including my meeting with Michael Gove" [4b]. Smith provided XR activists with **"an understanding of design"** so as a group we could make critical comments on the climate assemblies that have ensued, at both local and national levels" [4a].

As with the parliamentary Brexit debate, Smith has not been an advocate for citizens' assemblies at any price. He played an influential role in persuading XR not to rush into running its own citizens' assembly as part of its International Rebellion in April 2019: **"Graham convinced us that... if XR runs a citizens' assembly we will discredit the idea as people will see citizens'**

assemblies as tools that campaign/lobby groups use, rather than a trusted democratic process that represents the views of the country” [4b].

(5) Impact on Today For Tomorrow

Smith has been instrumental in shaping the Today For Tomorrow campaign that aims to enshrine a UK Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill [5a]. The campaign, led by Lord Bird MBE, the founder of *The Big Issue* magazine, reached out to Smith in his position as Chair of the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development (FDSD) to help build support for the bill and to develop its content. The Bill builds on earlier Welsh legislation and had its first reading in parliament on 8 January 2020. Its passage has been delayed by the impact of Covid-19 on parliamentary business.

Oliver Sidorczuk, former Advisor to Lord Bird states that Smith’s input to the drafting of the Bill “improves on the Welsh legislation” [5b]. Drawing explicitly on his academic work (particularly output [4]), Smith proposed the incorporation of citizens’ assemblies to determine wellbeing goals and oversee the work of a UK Future Generations Commissioner. Sidorczuk states: “These improvements to the bill, suggested and drafted by Graham, **place citizens at the heart of a new, sustainable, democratic decision-making model and would not be in the draft legislation without his guidance and expertise**” [5b].

Smith facilitated a workshop at the University of Westminster on 13 November 2019 of core stakeholders from across the public, private and voluntary sector to understand and address areas of contention, and to build support for the bill; he formally presented the bill to over 50 MPs and Peers at its parliamentary launch on 12 January 2020; and he addressed civil society leaders at a reception for its launch at the House of Lords the same evening. Sidorczuk confirms that Smith’s “**expertise, leadership, and knowledge... professionalised and propelled our campaign in an extremely crowded political space**, setting the Today For Tomorrow and the private member’s bill on the best possible footing for the future” [5b].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. a. Tim Hughes, Director of Involve, Interview transcript, 15 January 2020; b. Clive Betts MP and Sarah Wollaston MP, “How a Citizens’ Assembly helped select committees find social care consensus”, *Hansard Society Blog*, 10 October 2018 [\[link\]](#); c. Climate Change Committee. 2020. *The Sixth Carbon Budget: The UK’s path to Net Zero* [\[link\]](#); d. DCMS Innovations in Democracy Programme [\[link\]](#); e. Statement from Miriam Levin, former Head of Community Action at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS), 11 December 2020.
2. a. Neil Lawson, Director of Compass, Interview transcript, 1 April 2020; b. Lisa Nandy and Stella Creasy, “MPs alone won’t solve the Brexit deadlock. We need a citizens’ assembly”, *The Guardian*, 16 January 2019 [\[link\]](#); c. Rowan Williams, Damon Albarn, Ruth Lister, Laura Janner-Klausner, Jonathan Coe, Ian McEwan, Caitlin Moran, Neal Lawson and 13 other signatories, “A citizens’ assembly could break the politicians’ Brexit deadlock”, Letter to *The Guardian*, 16 December 2018 [\[link\]](#) + Portfolio of follow-up media stories.
3. a. Ostbelgien, “German-speaking community Parliament decides to introduce permanent citizens’ dialogue”, 25 February 2019 (German language) [\[link\]](#); b. Yves Dejaeghere, G1000, Interview transcript, 30 January 2020; c. Ieva Cesnulyte, “How Ostbelgien became a trailblazer in deliberative democracy: An interview with Yves Dejaeghere”, *OECD New Democratic Institutions series*, 30 April 2020 [\[link\]](#); d. Portfolio of articles on the Permanent Citizens Dialogue [PDF]; e. *The Economist*, “A Belgian experiment that Aristotle would have approved of: direct democracy in action”, 5 October 2019 [\[link\]](#).
4. a. Statement from Extinction Rebellion Citizens’ Assembly Working Group Members, 16 May 2020; b. Statement from Linda Doyle, Former Coordinator of Extinction Rebellion Citizens’ Assembly Working Group, 8 April 2020.
5. a. Today For Tomorrow campaign website [\[link\]](#); b. Statement from Oliver Sidorczuk, former Advisor to Lord Bird MBE, 30 August 2020.