Integrating Public Deliberation for Impact:
Learning from the European Wave of Citizens' Assemblies (i4i)

Citizens' assemblies (CA) – procedures that bring together randomly selected people to deliberate on political issues and to make recommendations – are increasingly adopted throughout Europe as a novel way to reconnect representative institutions with citizens and develop solutions, e.g., for grand challenges such as climate change. Researchers have mixed opinions about how effective CAs really are: some are enthusiastic, while others are critical. However, the reality is more complicated. Evidence is, however, still scarce because existing studies tend to focus on policy impacts, neglecting the ways that CAs may have impacts on the institutions and political processes, run alongside the process and finish before long-term impacts can be assessed, look at internal design features of CAs and pay little attention to the *integrative* features that connect CAs into the political system; or examine individual cases, which are not able to provide broad, general insights.

The most recent research suggests that the impact of CAs might depend on how they are designed and integrated into the political system. In other words, what their *integrative design features* are. Therefore, the aim of the i4i project is to investigate how the various integrative elements of citizens' assemblies shape their impact on the broader political context. Examples of these features include whether a CA is a permanent process or a single event, who organizes it (a public institution or civil society) and whether its nature is merely consultative or, to some extent, binding. These issues raise three important questions that are essential for understanding the use of CAs in contemporary European democracies:

- *Do CAs have an impact, and if so, what kinds of impact?*
- *What integrative design features are used to connect CAs into the political system?*
- *What is the relationship between these integrative design features and successfully realising impact?*

i4i takes advantage of the unique opportunity of the Weave programme to bring together leading researchers from Belgium, Germany and Poland to conduct the first Europe-wide, systematic comparative analysis to answer these questions. It builds a database of 40 climate assemblies across national and subnational levels, analysing them through a combination of documentary analysis, process observation, qualitative interviews, survey experiments and Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA).

The project will compare a number of cases with their different designs to see which features of integrating CAs into the political system led to the greatest impact. Then, it will study a few selected cases to understand how those features work in specific situations. By doing that, the project will:

1) produce systematic, real-world data on European CAs' integrative design features and their impacts on political institutions, decision-making, and policies;
2) provide a detailed and comprehensive understanding of how these different integrative design features are corelated to the CAs' impacts, which will allow us to make a realistic assessment of the overall effects of CA;
3) develop a better understanding of how democracy and deliberation work.

i4i will make an important contribution to academic knowledge by providing new explanations and concrete evidence on how to use and design CAs in contemporary European democracies, so that they work effectively. This is especially important because there are so many of these processes happening across Europe right now.