FACILITATORS' INSIGHTS FROM THE VORARLBERG CITIZENS' COUNCILS: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY ON THE PROCESS OF COLLABORATIVE MEANING-MAKING

A dissertation submitted

by

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to

FIELDING GRADUATE UNIVERSITY

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

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Facilitators' Insights from the Vorarlberg Citizens' Councils:

A Qualitative Research Study on the Process of Collaborative Meaning-Making

by

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Abstract

This qualitative research project is based on interviews with professional facilitators of the Vorarlberg *Bürgerräte* in Austria. These sortition-based citizens' councils use "Dynamic Facilitation," a group method designed to stimulate creativity, harvest differences, and discover common ground. The spread of these councils and their subsequent institutionalization led to their inclusion in the OECD 2020 report on Innovative Citizen Participation. Inspired by John Forester's narrative studies of facilitators and mediators of multi-stakeholder processes, 11 in-depth interviews and one focus group were conducted with public participation professionals responsible for organizing and/or facilitating these councils. Critical moments served as entry points to elicit thick narratives; facilitators were also asked to reflect on the meaning these instances held for them. The narratives document facilitators' commitments in practice to hold space for deep encounters of self and others, welcome divergent perspectives, elicit convergence on a set of policy recommendations, and develop strong forum-system linkages as a way to honor and respect participants' work. Further analysis explores how facilitators evoke climates of mutual respect and psychological safety to support participants to go beyond their initial positions and arrive at new shared possibilities. Useful theoretical lenses include Sanders' construct of "testimony" as previously applied by Asenbaum to the work of these councils; Barrett-Lennard's facilitative relational empathy based on Carl Rogers' work; Kadlec and

Friedman's notion of confluence; Mary Parker Follett's constructs of creative integration (win-win outcomes) and distinctions between power-over and power-with, and literature in empathy, deliberative democracy, organization development, and integrative mediation.

Keywords: group facilitation, deliberative democracy, citizens' councils, Mary Parker Follett, Vorarlberg *Bürgerräte*, empathic listening, democratic innovations

Dedication

In loving memory

Sybil J. Reinthaler

1926 -1996

how do I thank you,
for listening my soul into being?

when I first met you,
I was a child
and you were completing your Ph.D.

now,
here I am
and you,
you are everywhere…

* * * * * * *

Acknowledgements,

Appreciations, and Gratitude

I want to begin by thanking Juanita Brown. You offered powerful questions during a period of way-finding; and then, when I realized I wanted to engage in doctoral work, you recommended Fielding Graduate University. Without your sage counsel, I would not be here today.

Now for my ancestors. Gratitude to all of you; you have each contributed to who I am today. I especially want to acknowledge my paternal grandmother, Felicita Gabaldoni de Zubizarreta; you helped raise me, and recognized me at an early age as "*una abogada de pobres,*" protector of the underdog. Also my maternal great-grandmother, Dolores Salvador Méndez; your bright light lives on in my mother's stories.

My mother, Alma Flor Ada; I am deeply grateful to you for life itself, as well as for all the support you have offered at various times along the way. I am also delighted that, having led so many of your own students through this, you have finally had the opportunity to witness me celebrating my 60th birthday by laboring on a dissertation!

My father, Armando Francisco Zubizarreta; your life has embodied, for understandable reasons, both Lakoff's "argument as war" (in *Metaphors We Live By*) as well as *La aventura del trabajo intelectual*, the title of one of your own books. I've spent a lifetime being inspired by the latter, while finding alternatives to the former. You taught me to question everything; it was not so easy when I began questioning you. Yet your eventual encouragement and good wishes on my journey have meant a great deal.

My brothers, Alfonso, Miguel, and Gabriel Zubizarreta, you have each contributed at various times and in various ways toward helping finance my doctoral studies. I am deeply grateful for that, as well as for the joy that your children (now grown!) bring. I celebrate each of my niblings: Tim & Camarie, Samantha, Victoria & William, Nicholas, Daniel, Doug, Camille & Mark, Jessica, Collette… and the next generation now starting to come into the world, beginning with Ziana.

Judith Zubizarreta, I am deeply grateful for your kindness and encouragement, for your loving support of my father, and for the stability and care you offer him.

Francisca Isabel Campoy, *mi queridísima hada madrina*, your continuous encouragement and daily conversations during a time of major heartbreak and loss, have sustained me in moving forward. Your faith in me has moved mountains.

This dissertation is the culmination of a journey that began long ago. Harlan Wilson, professor at Oberlin College, where I spent too brief a time in my early 20's: you introduced me to the wonders of political theory, and for that, I am eternally grateful. Professor Michaelson, you introduced me to Feuerbach and species-being: the "primacy of the species in the moral ordering of the human being." Or, as I wrote in my paper for you, an early equivalent of "Rastafarian One Love."

Tom Atlee, you were the first person I met who mirrored my own commitment to activism AND persistent curiosity about organization development, that promethean fire born "in the belly of the beast." While you had little patience for academia, your commitment to your own intellectual work outside the academy inspired me to enroll in a master's program in OD, after you introduced me to Jim Rough and his "Dynamic

Facilitation Skills" workshop. Two decades later, when I was back in school doing doctoral work, you introduced me to Dr. Jane Mansbridge. My gratitude is beyond words.

Saul Eisen, dear friend and mentor… at Sonoma State University, you taught me by example what it meant to practice, not just organization development, but human systems development at multiple levels of system. Among the many things I treasure, is the twinkle in your eye when I told you during my admissions interview, that my purpose in applying was to "liberate the knowledge" that was in OD – and you responded by saying, "Welcome to the program!" After I graduated, it was an honor and a joy to be a teaching assistant in your second-year seminar, and later returning to offer day-long workshops for the students in the program.

Manfred Hellrigl, we first met in 2009, when Jim invited you to present in San Diego at the conference of the International Association for Public Participation, and then several times in Austria, including at two small yet highly memorable conferences that you and your office organized on Dynamic Facilitation and the *Bürgerräte*. Your lived example of participatory leadership has been deeply inspiring, and your encouragement and moral support at various times during my journey has been enormously helpful.

With regard to my doctoral studies, I am hugely grateful for the humanistic approach to education offered at Fielding. Professor Bentz, your courses on hermeneutics and phenomenology reawakened my fascination with philosophy. Professor Guilarte, it was lovely to share so many intellectual interests with you: dialogue, group process, post-traumatic growth. Professor Fisher, your course on social and environmental justice introduced me to the world of scholar-activists. Professor Lynam and Professor Corley, while I never got to take a course with either of you, your friendship and ongoing

encouragement meant a lot! Professors Blake, Appelbaum, and Steier, thank you for keeping “Systems” alive at Fielding, and for inviting me to be your teaching assistant.

I am also very grateful to my cohort of fellow doctoral students, with whom I started the program in the fall of 2014, especially Tetyana Azarova, Zabrina Epps, Che Borkhetaria, and Akasha Pete Saunders. Thank you for your support and friendship. Also, much appreciation to Linda Urban… though we were not in the same cohort, we somehow managed to find each other!

By the time I started writing my dissertation, much of my cohort had already graduated. My loneliness as a doctoral student at a distance-learning institution was eased by some outside-of-Fielding activities, especially the Dialogic OD study-and-writing group started by Gervase Bushe and Bob Marshak. Thank you, Gervase and Bob! And much appreciation to Lori Nemeth (Fielding alum), Danny van Montfort, Ann-Louise Howard, and Moira van Staaden for the nourishing brain-food of our wide-ranging conversations.

After concluding my interviews, the later stages of my dissertation-writing process have been most ably supported by Margo J. Hittleman. Margo, your delight in my work, your honest feedback, and your insightful suggestions have been most helpful, even when I have chosen a different path. I have enormous admiration for your own creative work; it is a joy to have met you, and an honor to have benefited from your wise counsel and whole-hearted encouragement.

At Fielding, I have been blessed with a wonderful dissertation committee. Professor Melville, your course on “Democracy’s Dilemmas” was a very rich opportunity

to ground my doctoral studies in my chosen area of study. I am most grateful for your sincere appreciation of my work, and look forward to continued collaboration with you. Professor Rogers, I have found your clarity, probing questions, and straightforwardness most inspiring, and am honored by your willingness to be part of my dissertation committee in addition to your extensive leadership and administrative responsibilities. I hope you know how much I admire you as a leader, and how your example inspires me to step into my own leadership. Karl Hebenstreit, Jr., I am very grateful for your role as my student reader, for being fellow William E. Smith fans, and for your introducing me to Peter Elbow's work.

Professor Agger-Gupta… dearest Dorothy, your amazing openness and life-giving interest in… (well, I was going to say "in alternative paradigms," but honestly, in just about anything!) has made working with you such a deep joy and pleasure. I am so grateful for your light, and for your role as my dissertation advisor and chair of my committee. Your steadfast encouragement for me to trust myself has been transformative.

Dear Dr. Jane "Jenny" Mansbridge, the opportunity to work with you as my "external reader" has been such an enormous gift. To experience your generous mentorship and spirit of collegiality, your clear and direct feedback, as well as all of the relevant resources you have sent my way, has been deeply nourishing to the very core of my being. My best hope is that you might find some value in reading what I have written here, which draws upon a very small portion of your vast and wonderful academic work.

As I move to close this section, a deep bow to Jim Rough, the originator of Dynamic Facilitation and the Wisdom Council process. Jim, it has not been easy for us, as two strong-minded and highly creative people, to figure out how to co-exist at times,

let alone collaborate. Still, I have enormous appreciation for what you created, and I know you appreciate my contributions toward the larger project we share: a world where humans can fully apply their co-creative genius to the challenging situations we face.

While you and I have very different "theories of change," we both celebrate the growth of the *Bürgerräte* in Austria. It is already over 15 years of "proof of concept," that this is a useful method others can apply (in their own ways, of course!) to obtain fruitful results. Jean Rough, I miss you, and feel your loving presence here with us in spirit.

During this doctoral journey and everything that has led up to it, I have received more support than I sometimes realize. Much gratitude to friends, family, and colleagues, including Lyn Fine, Christine Kreminski, Bruce Nayowith, Tessa Nayowith, Hannah Nayowith, Matthias zur Bonsen, Holger Scholz, Roswitha Vesper, Christiana Wall, Uli Nagel, Pooja Prema, Meg Agnew, Vineeta Sood, Chuck Peters, Hannah Brooks, Denia Zamperlini, Denise Zubizarreta, Geoffrey (Lizard) Robinson, Doug Kamholz & Sheila Walk, and all others named and unnamed, who have befriended me over the years. Throughout the changes that life brings, your encouragement and support has meant so much. My apologies in advance for any inadvertent omissions.

And now for my last set of gratitudes. I am enormously indebted to all of the kind people who helped me find the participants for this project, including Stefan Lins and others. This includes the multi-talented film-maker, web designer, and NVC teacher Martin Rauch, who generously collaborated with this project as a research assistant. Martin, I am deeply grateful for your general moral support, as well as for your substantive contributions to this project as a first-rate interpreter, master networker, and a practitioner with deep knowledge of this field.

My heart-felt appreciation for the public participation professionals --both public administrators and free-lance practitioners -- who organize, experiment with, and facilitate the *Bürgerinnenräte* in Austria. I have met a few of you on previous occasions; several of you I have met for the first time in the course of this project; and I look forward to meeting many more of you, as your work and my work continues to evolve. Deep bows to all of you, as "essential workers" for a more participatory, communicative, and thoughtful democracy. You are an example to me that, in the best way possible, "the future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed" – yet!

I will close with my heartfelt gratitude and everlasting appreciation to those of you who were able and willing to take the time to participate in this research project. I literally could not have done this without you – you have been essential to this research project, just as clean air and clean water are essential to life.

I hope to have done justice, to some of the many stories you have shared with me. I apologize in advance for all that I was not able to include, and I claim as my own any errors I have made. I look forward to continuing this work in the future, so that more of us can continue to learn and benefit from your dedication to your work, and from the deep knowledge essential for human flourishing that you continue to develop in your practice.

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CHAPTER ONE – OVERVIEW OF STUDY

Rationale and Context

As more and more people awaken to the need for our societies to transition to social, political, and economic systems that are ecologically sustainable and socially just, the challenge can feel daunting. Given the scope of the problems, these transformations require the collective efforts of many different people in many different sectors of society. One of these sectors is that of people who facilitate effective group communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and self-governance, at various levels of scale – from small groups, workplaces, and communities, to municipalities, regions, and networks, as well as to larger systemic levels.

Those of us who do this kind of work, find ourselves in a variety of disciplinary fields; we may be practitioners of community organizing and community development, organization development and public engagement, public administration and planning, adult education and popular education, mediation and conflict resolution, democratic innovations and collaborative governance, or other related fields. Much learning has been taking place in each of these arenas, yet these communities of practice are often siloed from one another, which can limit interdisciplinary learning and practice.

One central context for this study is the realm of democratic innovation, in which there has been a great deal of growth and experimentation ever since the participatory movements of the '60s gave rise to a wide variety of participatory practices.[1]In turn, these participatory practices inspired the theory of participatory democracy.[2] While grassroots participatory

[1] Of course, the '60s had their own antecedents in the first half of the 20th century; in the US, this included most immediately the civil rights movement of the '50s.

[2] For a historical account of this evolution from practice to theory, see Mansbridge, 1999, pp. 311-315; also 2003, pp. 176-177; for an exemplary account of the theory of participatory democracy, which he termed "strong democracy," see Barber (1984).

practices faded somewhat as "involvements shifted toward the private" in the '80s, they lived on even while becoming "ghettoized in the feminist and ecological movements" (Mansbridge, 1999, p. 315). Then by the 1990s, a new set of practical experiments became more visible; governments and various non-profit organizations were experimenting with different kinds of participatory policy-making and deliberative governance – partly as "a response to declining trust in government and the need to demonstrate greater transparency and accountability" (Hendriks, 2009, p. 174).

In parallel, in the late 1980s and 1990s, participatory democratic theory was evolving into deliberative democratic theory (Floridia, 2018); this academic field has been growing significantly in the last 20 years (Bächtiger et al., 2018) and has experienced a number of "generations" or "turns" (Elstub et al., 2018). Eventually, as part of its "empirical turn," deliberative theorists began to study these democratic innovations, many of which had been independently initiated by practitioners in non-profit organizations and governments.[3] Now, let's fast-forward a bit to the present.

Citizens' Assemblies and Citizens' Councils

In recent years, mainstream news media have begun reporting about a democratic innovation called the "Citizens' Assembly" (The Economist, 2020). The first one took place in 2003 in British Columbia; more recent instances have taken place in Ireland, Poland, Britain, Australia, and France (Devaney et al., 2020; Renwick et al., 2018; Lang, 2007). Participants are chosen through sortition, a public lottery, and are then invited to participate in an extended

[3] For a clear acknowledgement that most "democratic innovations are not normally invented or designed by democratic theorists", see O'Flynn (2019, p. 41). I will leave to conjecture whether activists growing older and becoming more involved in institutions had something to do with the creation of these experiments sponsored by government and/or by non-profits -- and/or, had something to do with the public demand for them. For the history of some of these innovative experiments, many of which started long before the term "deliberative democracy" became widespread, see Carson et al. (2018).

process of learning and deliberating together about an issue. At the end of this process, they craft a policy recommendation given to the sponsoring body, usually a governmental agency. Sortition has an ancient lineage, having played a significant role in Athenian democracy (Carson & Martin, 1999) and is presently a common feature in various democratic innovations termed "mini-publics" (Ryan & Smith, 2014). While much smaller than citizens' assemblies, the Vorarlberg *Bürgerrat*, the topic of this dissertation, is a member of a growing family of sortition-based democratic innovations.

In June of 2020, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) published "Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave," a report featuring 12 different deliberative processes. Their criteria for inclusion were

> • deliberation: a long and careful consideration of topics by means of facilitated discussion consisting of a minimum one full day of meetings;
>
> • representativeness: choosing participants by random selection (sortition) with demographic stratification; and
>
> • impact: decision makers agree to respond to and act on recommendations of a give process (p. 13).

Of the 12 processes chosen, some are more familiar to English-speaking audiences than others. The first four include the aforementioned Citizens' Assembly; the Citizens' Jury (Crosby & Nethercut, 2005; Crosby, 1986, 1996, 2003); the Consensus Conference model (Hendriks, 2005); and the Planning Cell format (Hendriks, 2005). The sixth model on the list, the Austrian Citizens' Council, has been used in Austria and parts of Germany since 2006[4]. The OECD

---

[4] The Austrian Citizens' Council described here is different than the Citizens' Council that forms part of the Ostbelgien model, which is a permanent representative deliberative body (OECD, 2020, pp. 57-58).

report highlights that this Citizens' Council model was "designed to address community issues in a quick and inexpensive manner, strengthening community ties along the way" (p. 48).

In the German-speaking world, the Citizens' Councils have been known as *Bürgerräte*, or more recently, "Vorarlberg *Bürgerräte,"* referring to the state in Austria where this model was developed, and from where it has spread more broadly to other German-speaking regions.[5] In Vorarlberg, Citizens' Councils were institutionalized in 2013 as a regularly occurring element of the workings of the state government; they can be initiated by the state parliament, the state government, or by petition of the citizenry (OECD, 2020, p. 138). The purpose of these councils is to obtain considered public input on a given public policy issue. Its form was originally inspired by the "Wisdom Council" model developed by U.S. management consultant Jim Rough; a key feature of both the original model and the European version is the use of Dynamic Facilitation, a process designed to "lead to openness, inclusion, and creative solutions" (OECD, 2020, p. 48-49).

Public engagement practitioners in Austria modified the original Wisdom Council format in several significant ways (Zubizarreta et al., 2020); they also renamed it *Bürgerrat* (plural, *Bürgerräte,* or in the gender-inclusive version, *BürgerInnenRäte*) , which can be translated as "Citizens' Council." Some English-language materials refer to the *Bürgerrat* as the Wisdom Council in recognition of its origins (Asenbaum, 2016; Hellrigl & Lederer, 2014); others refer to it as the "Civic Council" to acknowledge that as an adaptation, this European model needs a new name (Büro für Zukunftsfragen, 2014;

[5] In the last few years, as the more recent and much larger Citizens' Assembly model has started to spread, organizations in German-speaking countries sponsoring larger Citizens' Assemblies have chosen to use the term *Bürgerrat* for their efforts; this has prompted the need to disambiguate the two different uses of this term. Thus, "Vorarlberg" is now used as a modifier to denote the smaller Citizens' Council.

Zubizarreta, 2015). However, following the publication of the OECD report, I will henceforth call it the Citizens' Council[6].

History, Development, and Dissemination of Citizens' Councils

As a budding scholar-practitioner, I was pleased to hear the news that the OECD report had recognized the Vorarlberg Citizens' Council model. Ever since my first encounter with Dynamic Facilitation in 2000, I have used this approach in my consulting practice, focused mainly on the small business and non-profit sectors. I have also written about this methodology (Zubizarreta, 2013) and led workshops on it. After learning in 2006 that this process was being used in Austria as the "operating system" for these councils, I followed these developments with interest and travelled to Austria to meet with practitioners there. Below is a brief historical overview of the beginnings and ensuing spread of this work.

In the early 1980s, Jim Rough worked as an internal consultant at Simpson Timber Company in Northern California, helping hourly sawmill workers reach creative breakthroughs on challenging workplace issues by experimenting with an assortment of creative methods he had learned from practitioners at the Creative Problem-Solving Institute in Buffalo (Israel, 1983). In the early 1990s, Rough began offering public seminars on facilitation, based on the powerful experiences he'd had working with groups at the sawmill and the insights thus gained. Rough also began experimenting with the Wisdom Council model, a strategy he created for working with larger organizations or communities. His model was based on facilitating transformational conversations with

---

[6] See p. 13 of the OECD report for a clarification that this term is meant in a more inclusive sense of "inhabitant of a particular place," not in the more restrictive sense of someone who is a 'legally recognized national". That would be a more desirable usage than the one that currently prevails in the US, where currently, as a Latina, the term "Citizens' Council" has painful connotations.

a randomly selected small group using Dynamic Facilitation, followed by the small group sharing their findings with the larger organization (Rough, 1995).

In 2005, Jim Rough and his wife Jean were invited by consultant Matthias zur Bonsen to teach a Dynamic Facilitation and Wisdom Council seminar in Germany. One of the participants there was Manfred Hellrigl, a public administrator from the Austrian state of Vorarlberg. Hellrigl was the director of the state-level *Büro für Zukunftsfragen*, known in English as the Office for Future-Related Issues or OFRI.[7] The mandate of this office was the promotion of sustainability, public engagement, and social capital.[8] Thus when Hellrigl first encountered Jim Rough's Wisdom Council format and subsequently began experimenting with this model (Hellrigl & Lederer, 2014) he already had experience with a wide variety of public participation methodologies, including Citizen Juries and Planning Cells.

After some initial opportunities to apply Dynamic Facilitation and to experiment with the Wisdom Council model, Hellrigl was pleased to find this format equally useful to ones he had worked with previously. At the same time, he found this approach significantly more cost-effective than ones he had used earlier, and so continued to work with it (Hellrigl, 2012). The method began to spread: by mid-2014, Vorarlberg's *Büro für Zukunftsgragen* had successfully conducted 32 of these councils at municipal and regional levels on a variety of themes (Büro für Zukunftsfragen, 2014). In 2015, the Vorarlberg state government asked the *Büro* to conduct a state-wide council process on the theme of refugees and asylum-seekers; in 2016, that project won renown as well as two national awards, the *Verwaltungspreis* (Public Administration

---

[7] The literal translation is "Office for Questions about the Future."

[8] Recently renamed *Büro für Freiwilliges Engagement und Beteiligung* or Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation), the mandate of this office continues to be the same as before.

Award) and the *Ögut-Umweltpreis* (Environmental Award) for participation and civic engagement.

Meanwhile, the model spread to other parts of Austria and Central Europe. In 2016, the Citizens' Council model was used by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment (BMUB) for their Integrated Environmental Plan 2030 (IUP). For this project, they organized six Citizens' Councils in six different major cities in Germany (Rausch, 2016). In the rest of Austria, by mid-2018, there were over 70 instances of Citizens' Councils *outside* of Vorarlberg (personal communication, Martina Handler). Thus it appears that, as of this writing, there have been well over a hundred instances in all.

Yet despite their growing use in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, little English-language research has been available on these councils (for some recent exceptions, see Toth, 2017 and Asenbaum, 2016.) My desire to help make this knowledge more available to the English-speaking world led me to apply to Fielding in 2014, in hopes of eventually doing research on this growing approach to public participation.

In the US, there has *not* been similar spread of the original Wisdom Council model (nor of the updated Citizens' Council model) within the realm of public engagement and democratic innovations. While there have been a few isolated public sector experiments initiated by volunteers (personal communication, Jim Rough), there has not been anyone to date in a position to conduct repeated "natural experiments" as Manfred Hellrigl did in Vorarlberg. Differences in the adoption pattern of new models in different geographic sectors are not unusual when it comes to the diffusion of innovations, a process which involves multiple factors of different types (Wejnert, 2002); these differences have not been my focus here. Instead, my intention has been

to focus on the experience of professionals who have been facilitating this Citizens' Council process in Austria, where this model has been spreading.

In the meantime, in the US there has been a growing interest in a variety of other sortition-based models for engaging the public in the creation of public policy. For example, a recent report issued by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2020) "Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century," recommends a greater use of citizens' assemblies in the US (strategy 3.3, p. 44-46) while also recommending several other processes including citizens juries, deliberative polling, participatory budgeting, and dialogue to change as "participatory processes that engage citizens in the give-and-take of government decision-making" (Strategy 3.4, pp. 46-47). While these models have significant differences among them, they also have relevant similarities. Thus, a study of the experiences of facilitators of the Austrian Citizens' Councils can have useful implications for other participatory processes in the US, as well as implications for deliberative theory more generally.

Format of the *Bürgerrat*

In brief, the structure of these temporary councils is as follows: an initial pool of 300 or so community members are chosen by lot using a mathematically random process (sortition), and are sent formal invitations to participate in a 2-day facilitated gathering by the local municipality, region, or state that is sponsoring the council. From those who accept the invitation, stratified sampling is used to select a group of 12 to 15. If there are many submissions, or if it is a particularly significant issue, two councils of 15 people each are formed. After the formation of the council(s), their task is to arrive at a consensus statement on a particular policy area. To support participants in this work, the core methodology used is Dynamic Facilitation, an approach designed to welcome

divergent perspectives and generate a psychologically safe environment for participants to engage creatively with differences. This open-source methodology involves a highly active role on the part of the facilitator, which includes the abundant use of "mirroring back" to check for understanding, as well as a rapid-prototyping approach of welcoming and eliciting solutions, both initially and throughout the process (Zubizarreta et al., 2020; Asenbaum, 2016; Trattnigg & Haderlapp, 2014). While non-directive with regard to content, the facilitator is directive with regard to structure. For a significant part of the process, participants are asked to direct their comments to the facilitator rather than to one another, which Hans Asenbaum (2016) describes as somewhat akin to Lynn Sanders' (1997) notion of testimony (pp. 370-372); more on this, in Chapter 5.

Once the council(s) complete their work, they share their findings at a *BürgerCafé*, an open public meeting hosted using the World Café method. After hearing the councils' recommendations, café participants explore their own responses, first in small tables, then as a large group. Administrators from the sponsoring agencies are present at the *BürgerCafé*, where they take both the council's recommendations, as well as the public response to these recommendations, under advisement.[9]

After the *BürgerCafé*, the work of the *Bürgerrat* is complete, and the council is disbanded. Some of its participants may choose to participate in a newly-constituted Responders Group (also called a Resonance Group). This group consists of one or two volunteers from the council and one or two volunteers from community members attending the *BürgerCafé*, as well as representatives of the various public agencies and

[9] BürgerCafés, a long-standing element of this model, can be seen as a step toward greater accountability to the wider citizen body. The lack of this accountability more generally in minipublics has been the subject of recent critiques, as described by Setäla & Smith (2018).

non-profits who will need to be involved in the implementation of the recommendations. This new group meets monthly to monitor and support the implementation of some or all of the recommendations. In 6 months, this small follow-up group reports to the larger community at an open public meeting, on the progress made on the council's recommendations (Zubizarreta et al., 2020; Toth, 2017; Hellrigl & Lederer, 2014).[10]

Impacts of the Austrian Citizens' Councils

As mentioned above, in 2014 when OFRI published an evaluation of the work they had done thus far, they had conducted 32 of these councils at municipal and regional levels, including six state-wide councils. Their "Interim Report" includes perspectives from policy-makers, state and local administrators, and council participants, who were largely enthusiastic while also pointing out some limitations and areas for improvement. In addition, the report includes both supportive and critical perspectives from academics. Policy-makers appreciated how the councils had not become the mouthpiece for special interest groups, but instead, thanks to random selection, spoke for a broad and diverse public. Administrators mentioned their relief that "The fear of long wish lists to Santa Claus has not been realized. Instead, constructive proposals predominate, and essential things are named in ways that are completely self-critical, realistic and responsible" (Büro fúr Zukunftsfragen, 2014, p. 6). Former council participants spoke about how meaningful they had found the experience, commenting specifically on how motivated and engaged they had become, how much learning had taken place, and how much valuable information and perspectives their fellow citizens had contributed. Elements they appreciated included the opportunity to be deeply heard, the creative energy of the process, and

[10] The addition of the Responder's Group to the original model, one of the modifications added by the Büro, was created to support the influence of the council's work on the decision-making process. This element could be seen as an example of "designed coupling", as described Setäla & Smith (2018).

the value of having a diverse group of participants. They also valued the opportunity to discover their shared ability to develop new and creative results, especially on difficult topics.

With regard to specific policy outcomes, one council on "What makes a good neighborhood?" led to the concept of "neighborhood democracy," which further evolved into "settlement work in Vorarlberg." As a result, the state government's Institute for Social Services incorporated this into their service design, and adopted specific elements proposed in the council including a Conciliation Board to support residents in conflict situations. Additional examples of specific policy outcomes attributed to the councils include the creation of fitness trails; further expansion of bike paths; the introduction of a state-wide annual transportation fare to increase the use of public transit; extra funding for elementary schools, for which the state government sought a loan from the federal government; increasing state support available for families; and increased attention to policy regulating vacant properties (Büro fúr Zukunftsfragen, 2014).

As mentioned earlier, in 2015 the *Büro* conducted a state-wide council on the extremely thorny topic of refugees and asylum-seekers; a professional English translation of that council's outcome document is available as the *Civic Council Report: Vorarlberg Asylum and Refugee Policies* (Büro für Zukunftsfragen, 2015) as well as an in-depth Participedia entry. Afterward, state-wide councils have continued on a yearly basis, with one in 2016 on the theme of youth and their future opportunities, one in 2017 on land policies, one in 2018 on transportation and mobility, and one in 2019 on the future of agriculture[11].

Purpose of this Research Project

Ever since the use of these councils started to grow in Austria, I have felt drawn to learn more about how this facilitation method has been applied to the growing field of

[11] https://www.buergerrat.net/at/vorarlberg/landesweiter-buergerrat/

democratic innovations. This has been partly due to my own work as a professional facilitator, and also a result of my commitments to societal change. I have wanted to see what those of us in the English-speaking world, including the US, might be able to learn from these ongoing "natural experiments" in Austria.

More recently, I have been inspired by the work of Extinction Rebellion (XR), a non-violent direct-action movement that began in the UK to spur public awareness and government action in response to the long-foreseen climate crisis. This activist movement seeks to promote deliberative democracy, both among activists as well as among the public[12]; their "third demand" is that governments host citizens' assemblies on climate change to guide the transition to a sustainable culture. Thus, as part of their educational and outreach efforts, XR has been collaborating with experts in the deliberative democracy field to explain to the public what citizens' assemblies are, and how they function (Extinction Rebellion, 2019).

The *Bürgerrat*, a more streamlined and economically accessible format than a Citizens' Assembly, could be a potentially useful addition to a larger menu of sortition-based processes – whether from a public engagement perspective, a community organizing perspective, or an activist perspective. Recently, Citizens' Councils have been mentioned in *No Representation Without Consultation: A Citizen's Guide to Participatory Democracy*, a visionary proposal for a consultative branch of government based on a network of "Futures Councils" (Nanz & Leggewie, 2019). Examples of Citizens' Councils are also featured in *Reconstructing Democracy: How Citizens are*

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[12] A general interest in participatory decision-making is typical of social change movements; see Blaug's concept of "outbreaks of democracy" (1999).

Building from the Ground Up, an inspiring call for countering right-wing populism with the spread of grassroots projects at a local level (Taylor, Nanz, & Taylor, 2020).

In order to implement these proposals (as well as most other forms of democratic innovation), group facilitation is a necessary ingredient; facilitators and/or mediators are "central figures in almost all structured deliberative democratic exercises," while at the same time "strikingly absent from most deliberative democratic theory" (Forester & Kahane, 2010, p. 229.) Thus, a greater understanding of this role is key, including the various forms it can take within different formats for democratic engagement.

Combining my interests in group facilitation and in democratic innovations, the purpose of this research project is to study the experience of facilitators who have facilitated Austrian Citizens' Councils, to learn more about how they themselves understand their work. My initial research question has two parts. The first is, *What insights emerge from facilitators' individual and collective reflections on transformative moments within the group dynamics of these councils?* And then, *What are the larger democratic implications of the work that these facilitators are doing?*

By "transformative moments," I mean either particularly challenging moments with regard to the group process, or particularly meaningful moments. I have been curious to learn how facilitators see these moments as affecting the process and outcome of the group. By "group dynamics," I mean the behaviors and psychological processes that occur in the course of group development.

As for the larger implications of this research, I have mentioned above that part of the appeal of the citizen' councils has been their documented ability to accomplish significant results in a relatively short amount of time; thus, at lower cost. This makes

them more affordable, which implies an issue of accessibility. It may be that the Citizens' Councils' effectiveness in helping people with divergent perspectives arrive at shared ways forward, is connected with their operating system: a facilitation process designed to foster creativity. As Asenbaum (2016) writes about the two councils he observed,

> The moderation principle that gives attention to one person at a time, letting this individual freely express and elaborate on his or her thoughts as everybody else listens and ponders what is said, allows for the creation of new solutions. Telling stories, giving testimony, and listening facilitate inclusion in a contingent "we," while both [affirming] belonging and maintaining independence. (p.8)

By listening to some of the professionals who facilitate these highly popular, low-cost councils, my intention has been to learn about their own experiences and insights, as well as gather their accounts of what their work looks like in practice. After observing two councils for his research, Asenbaum (2016) interviewed the facilitator of those councils; my aim here is to take a useful step that will expand and build upon his work.

For the first part of my research question, I focused my interview questions on facilitators' experiences regarding significant moments within the Councils they have facilitated, and how those moments influenced the overall outcomes of the Council. To obtain their reflections on the process of collaborative meaning-making that occurs within the *Bürgerrat* during the work of exploring an issue and arriving at consensus statements, I elicited some thick descriptions of their experience, observations, and actions during a particular council of their choice.

In addition, after the individual interviews with each participant, I also hosted a focus group where participants could engage in a collaborative exploration. To explore the second part of my research question, I invited facilitators' perspectives on how the

work of these councils fits into the larger project of democracy, and how the contributions of these councils might be enhanced.

I provide more detail on my methodology in Chapter 3. For now, I want to affirm that my intention as a researcher has been to honor the work of these practitioners as "researchers in action" (Schön, 1983) while also supporting the collaborative conversion of their implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge, according to Nonaka's model of knowledge creation (as described in Rynes et al., 2001). The next chapter is a review of the relevant literature that frames the question, and that I have drawn on as I interpreted my findings. For now, I will conclude this chapter with a brief recap of my own involvement with this work.

My Positionality as a Researcher

As mentioned earlier, I first encountered Dynamic Facilitation in 2000. At the time, my professional and academic background was in education. I had worked as a bilingual classroom teacher, a free-lance writer of bilingual educational materials, and a curriculum developer at an education reform non-profit organization that promoted constructivist approaches to academic and social-emotional learning.

My initial encounter with this facilitation modality re-ignited a long-time interest in organization development and conflict transformation. Inspired to return to school, I completed a second master’s degree in 2002 at Sonoma State University, in a highly experiential organization development program which offered ample opportunities for supervised field work and internships. For my master’s project, I interviewed consultants, mediators, facilitators, and professors whose work had been influenced by learning Dynamic Facilitation. To ground my project in the application of group facilitation to

larger social contexts, I delved into Barber's work on strong democracy (1984), Pearce and Littlejohn's work on moral conflict (1997), and Burbules' work on dialogue (1993).

While at Sonoma State, I also worked with my activist mentor, friend, and colleague Tom Atlee to help write, edit, and publish his general-audience book on democracy, *The Tao of Democracy* (2003). Through that project, I began to learn about various practical innovations in democracy, from Danish consensus councils to citizens' juries. Subsequently, I was commissioned by the Fetzer Institute's Collective Wisdom project to write a "seed essay" inspired by Tom's book (Zubizarreta, 2003). During that time, I also wrote a manual for this facilitation modality, drawing on my previous experience writing educational materials. Over a decade and many revisions later, I eventually published that manual in book form, "*From Conflict to Creative Collaboration: A User's Guide to Dynamic Facilitation*" (Zubizarreta, 2014). [13]

In 2006, when I first received news of Manfred Hellrigl's successful initial experiments with the Wisdom Council format in Austria, I was a new transplant to rural New England, having relocated there from California for family reasons. As a new stepmom to two pre-teen girls, I returned to school to complete an MSW and worked locally in community mental health. Five years later, inspired by news of the ongoing growth of Dynamic Facilitation in Europe and the spread of Wisdom Councils in Austria, I wrapped up my clinical practice and travelled to Germany and Austria to meet these

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[13] This was later translated as *La Facilitación Dinámica: Del Conflicto a la Colaboración Creativa* when I taught a course on Dynamic Facilitation in Chile. The manual has also been translated into German, where it is published as part of a larger book that Matthias zur Bonsen and I co-edited, called *Dynamic Facilitation: Die Erfolgreiche Moderations-Methode für Schwierige und Verfahrene Situationen.*

new colleagues. While my own German language skills were quite limited, many of the professionals I met were fluent in English. Their practice stories sparked a desire to conduct research on their work; three years later, in the fall of 2014, I enrolled at Fielding Graduate University for doctoral studies.

During my pre-dissertation coursework at Fielding, the use of the Austrian Citizens' Council model continued to spread. In my methodology chapter, I explore further my own positionality as an insider/outsider researcher. For now, I will turn to examine some of the relevant literature that influences this research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

My desire to return to school to research facilitators who support collaborative public policy processes, was quickened by reading John Forester's (2013, 2009) rich case studies on facilitators who mediate public stakeholder disputes. I was also inspired by Innes and Booher's (2010) work on "collaborative rationality" from the perspective of complexity theory. These authors from the field of planning write with great depth and nuance on the role of facilitators in planning processes. In contrast, I was surprised to discover that within the field of deliberative democracy, the role of moderators and facilitators has remained largely understudied and undertheorized for quite some time (as noted by Landwehr, 2014; Moore, 2012; Cooper & Smith, 2012; Smith, G., 2009; Forester & Kahane, 2009).

An Inherent Tension Within Deliberative Democracy

In 2012, citing a number of scholars who had called attention to the "lacuna" of academic studies on the role of facilitators in deliberative democracy, Alfred Moore described the situation succinctly as "facilitation is indispensable to deliberative practice, yet it is largely absent from deliberative theory" (p.147). Moore's own work has been a significant corrective in this regard, and he has a lot to say about this inherent tension between the normative and practical realms. Yet before going further, I want to show a brief example of what this lacuna can look like.

"Thick" and "thin" understandings of facilitation. When facilitation is mentioned in the literature on deliberative democracy, it is often described in a minimalistic manner: "This process requires a facilitator to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and follows the

ground rules" is a fairly common one-sentence description.[14] One typical illustration of this can be found in an engaging and informative textbook, *Public Participation for 21st Century Democracy* (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). While facilitation does not appear in the index, it is mentioned in the text early on, as part of the authors' description of their foundational distinction between thick participation and thin participation. In fact, "small-group facilitation" is listed as one of the five basic features of thick participation, and is described as something that

> helps each group set ground rules for their discussion and use of the time and materials they have been given. In most cases, this is a relatively light form of facilitation, often done by trained volunteers rather than issue experts or professionals. The main purpose of facilitators is to help guide the discussions, for example, by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to speak and follows the ground rules. (p. 16)

While Nabatchi and Leighninger consider facilitation as essential for thick participation, their description of the work that facilitators do could be seen as quite thin. In contrast, what might a thick description of facilitation look like? *The Handbook for Public Participation* (Creighton, 2005) points out that how a meeting is run will "tell participants whether they are being treated with respect, whether their opinions matter, and what their relative relationship is to each other" (p. 166). Describing facilitation as a "style of meeting leadership that has been proven to be highly effective in conducting public meetings" (p. 166), the author defines the facilitator's role as creating "a climate of mutual respect and psychological safety that makes it

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[14] For example, in Landemore's (2013) detailed and fascinating description of the Icelandic National Forum, she describes the facilitators at each small-group table as being "merely there to ensure that everyone had an equal opportunity to voice their opinions" (p. 159). This may indeed have been the role of those particular staff (often referred to in the trade as "table-top facilitators"); at the same time, the small groups are described as taking part in a broader, more elaborate process that was designed and conducted by "members of a company named Agora that specializes in crowdsourcing." What I am pointing out is that there is a continuum here, and the design and conduction of the larger event, can *also* be an aspect of the work that professional facilitators do.

possible for people to consider creative new solutions and move from preconceived positions" (p. 169).

Clearly, this latter conception of a facilitator's role -- creating "a climate of mutual respect and psychological safety that makes it possible for people to consider creative new solutions and move from preconceived positions" is a significantly thicker than simply "making sure that everyone takes turns." James L. Creighton (2004) describes facilitators as engaging in a repertoire of behaviors to carry out their role by meeting a variety of different objectives: these include not just to "keep the meeting on track and focused," but also to "clarify and accept communication," "accept and acknowledge feelings," "state a problem in a constructive way," "suggest a procedure or a problem-solving approach," "summarize and clarify direction," and "test for consensus" (pp. 170-171).

How might we understand this difference? Clearly the two books are written for different audiences; Creighton, an expert practitioner and one of the founders of the International Association for Public Participation, is writing for government officials and public and community leaders. In contrast, Nabatchi and Leighninger's (2015) fine textbook is addressed to classroom students. Another contributing factor might be the influence of the field itself; Creighton's handbook seems to be solidly identified with the field of planning, while it appears that Nabatchi and Leighninger may be writing about public participation from perspective of deliberative democracy. According to Moore (2012), mentioned earlier, the theoretical foundations of deliberative democracy pose an inherent difficulty for recognizing the value of facilitation; I shall now explore that perspective further.

How theory can create blind spots. Moore (2012) delves deeply into the contradiction between how *essential* the work of facilitators is with regard to deliberative fora, and yet how

largely *absent* they have been from deliberative theory as well as empirical accounts. He attributes this to the Habermasian normative framework that historically underlies much of deliberative theory. The three elements of an "ideal speech situation" are inclusion, freedom of speech, and freedom from coercion; yet given that the practical work of deliberation takes place "under ordinary limits of time, motivation, and pressure for conclusion" (p.148), this means that in practice, deliberation will fall short of the third aspect of the ideal speech situation, the absolute "freedom from coercion" while also placing constraints on the first two. Moore suggests that this necessary discrepancy between the ideal and the real explains why "accounts of deliberative ideals rarely include significant attention to the role of facilitator, even though some such role is obviously necessary for the production of any organized deliberation."

Moore (2012) also notes that (with some exceptions) a similar blind spot has existed in most empirical analyses of deliberation. Given that deliberative discourse is "ideally conceived as an unconstrained exchange of reasons" (p. 152), empirical studies have often focused on the structural conditions of deliberation and/or the deliberative quality of the conversation among participants, while ignoring or bracketing the role of the facilitator — even as other studies have shown that active facilitation "can be crucial to ensuring that marginalized voices are heard" (Smith, as quoted in Moore, p. 154)[15].

[15] Deliberative democracy has not been alone in its tendency to minimize the role of the group facilitator. Within the organization development field, starting in the 1990s and in parallel with the growth of large-group events that required a large number of small-group facilitators, there has been a trend in some sectors toward relying on trained volunteers (or even untrained volunteers) for small-group facilitation. While this is both understandable and beneficial in some situations, it can also obscure the value of the expertise that is needed in other contexts. The intention of wanting to minimize power differentials as much as possible is clearly laudable. In addition, given the many abuses that take place in the corporate world, the resulting mistrust of facilitative leadership is understandable, as evidenced in the coining of the term "facipulation." Still, to use an analogy, just because instances of medical malpractice exist, does not mean we should devalue the existence of all medical professionals. Furthermore, one can be very much in favor of the widespread training and deployment of "barefoot doctors" while simultaneously seeing a valuable role for professionals with more intensive education and training.

Similarly addressing theoretical concerns with regard to facilitation, Landwehr (2014) writes: “Considering reasons for and against intermediation, it seems that there are strong normative reasons against it but also strong pragmatic reasons in favor”. By “intermediaries,” Landwehr is specifically referring to chairpersons, moderators, mediators, or facilitators; given the pragmatic reasons for using intermediaries in deliberative forums, Landwehr writes that sponsors and designers of these events generally avail themselves of their services, “although apparently often without reflecting on their role and their impact.” She also brings up the topic of leadership in this connection, writing that “deliberative democrats’ lack of interest in leadership may thus result in a neglect of intermediation (which is nonetheless practiced for pragmatic reasons)” (p. 78.)

In his book on democratic innovations, G. Smith (2009) mentions how the work of facilitators has been “under-appreciated and under-theorised within democratic thought” and calls for more “systematic reflection” on it (p. 169). While not speculating on the reasons for this neglect of facilitation in the literature, Smith is clear about facilitation’s key role in “cultivating mutual respect and reciprocity” (p. 174) and realizing the “rights, principles, and dispositions” needed for public deliberation (pp. 197-198). In addition, he offers significant detail on the nuances of how facilitation plays out within each of the democratic innovations that he analyzes.

How researchers have attempted to fill in the picture. The bracketing of the role of the facilitator mentioned above by Moore in 2012, is something Blong (2008), a Fielding graduate, had sought to correct earlier by engaging in textual analyses that *included* the facilitators’ process comments as part of the co-construction of a deliberative event. In contrast to an earlier study by Hart and Jarvis (cited in Blong, 2008) that specifically *excluded* moderator comments from the conversational analysis of a deliberative process, Blong intentionally sought to focus on

the contribution of the moderators and how their statements and interventions influenced the larger communication patterns within a deliberative session. She also built upon Mansbridge et al.'s (2006) inductive study of facilitator norms, as well as Ryfe's work (2006) exploring the role of narrative in small-group forums and its correlation with facilitator style. All three of these studies will be described more fully below, as part of examining the history of initial efforts to study the role of the facilitator in the context of democratic innovations.

More recently, there have been a growing number of contributions in the area of facilitation and deliberation (Escobar, 2011, 2015, 2017, 2019; Forester, 1999, 2009. 2013, 2018; Kuhar et al., 2019; Prosser et al., 2018; Polletta & Gardner, 2018; Beauvais, 2018; Gastil & Black, 2018; Sandfort & Quick, 2017; Asenbaum, 2016; Quick & Sandfort, 2014; Black & Wiederhold, 2014; Dillard, 2013; Hardy, Fisher, & Hartz-Karp, 2013; Li et al., 2013; Cooper & Smith, 2012; Forester & Kahane, 2009). Even so, these studies constitute a distinct minority thread within the larger body of work in deliberative democracy, a field which has recently been experiencing explosive growth. Older attitudes seem to persist, along with a surprising lack of awareness of that work which *has* been done.

For example, recent work mentions the "lack of a strong theoretical or empirical exploration of moderators' roles in democratic deliberation" (Morrell, 2018, p. 242). Allowing that "facilitators and moderators exist to ensure that deliberation meets certain conditions," Morrell nevertheless expresses concern that "this would also seem to place them in a position of great, and possibly undemocratic, power" (p. 242). In contrast, Gastil[16] and Black (2018) find that overall, "the communication research on facilitators views their work as productive and

[16] Gastil was one of the co-authors in Mansbridge et al. (2006).

valuable for deliberation" (p. 509). It seems that this basic tension between the practical value of the role of the facilitator, and its possibly undemocratic nature, is still prevalent in the field.

Tensions Inherent to the Facilitators' Role

The tension between the normative dimension of deliberative democracy -- the ideal of complete equality and freedom from constraints for all participants in the conversation --and the practical need for the work of facilitators -- who by virtue of their function occupy a distinct role in the room -- shows up in some of the earliest studies of facilitators in this field, which I will examine in some detail below.

How do facilitators evaluate their colleagues' work? In Mansbridge et al's (2006) inductive research, ten White middle-class facilitators, nine from the U.S. and one from Britain, were asked to code a set of 10 videotapes drawn from a wide range of small-group deliberations. The intention was to discover the empirical norms that facilitators and moderators use to evaluate their own and their colleagues' practice in deliberative contexts.

The small-group deliberations represented in the videotapes differed in significant ways, including different goals, different discussion methods, and different group sizes and compositions. However, the intention was *not* to compare the effects of these differences, but instead to find general norms that were common throughout. Thus, the facilitators who served as coders were asked to use their own professional experience and judgment to code instances of what they perceived subjectively as "very good," "good," "problematic," or "highly problematic" interactions on the part of the other facilitators in the videotaped sessions. [17]

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[17] Coders were intentionally *not* offered any definitions of these categories a priori, but instead asked to provide their own rationale for each judgment; these comments were later thematized by the researchers.

The findings from this study identified some clear facilitator norms. In their role as coders, facilitators identified participant satisfaction and group productivity as relevant and interdependent success factors. The authors of this study pointed out this is broadly typical of facilitators of task groups, who see maintaining a good atmosphere and ensuring that a group makes progress on the task as the facilitator's primary responsibilities. Yet in the context of deliberative democracy this was a novel finding given that previously, deliberative theorists had been primarily concerned with the deliberative quality of events rather than participants' subjective experience of the process.

Additional facilitator norms uncovered by Mansbridge et al. (2006) included the "free flow" of ideas in conversation, as well as a cluster of three elements -- "extensive and inclusive participation in discussion," "self-facilitation and group control," and "fair representation of views" -- which they combined into a norm termed "equality." Here the researchers highlighted a significant tension between the norms of free flow of ideas and equality (understood as self-facilitation and group control), and the responsibility placed on facilitators to evoke a high-quality conversation.

The researchers pointed out the irony that, "given the many goals that the coders wanted the facilitators to accomplish, most also explicitly promoted the limited exercise of facilitator power and a low facilitator profile" (p. 30). They noted that, taken to its logical conclusion, the goal of these norms "would be to replace the facilitator entirely with self-facilitation" (p. 31). In a footnote, the researchers expanded upon the tension this creates for the facilitator:

> The facilitator had the responsibility for maintaining a modicum of equality and inclusion within the group, but at the same time could not intervene too much in the discussion to enforce that equality or inclusion. Many coders indicated that it was important for the members of the group to be in control of their mission, but at the same time almost unanimously held the *facilitator* responsible for keeping the mission of the group well focused. (Mansbridge et al., 2006, p. 32, emphasis in the original)

This tension between the value of participants' self-directedness and the facilitator's responsibility for the quality of deliberation was further explored by both Blong and Moore, as we will see next.

What are facilitators actually doing? In contrast to Mansbridge et al.'s study (2006) where groups differed greatly with regard to size, format, goals, and composition, the dissertation research conducted by Blong (2008) studied videotaped recordings of five deliberation sessions within the National Issues Forum tradition, thus having similar goals and using a similar discussion method. In addition, Blong's research was *not* focused on discovering norms held by facilitators about good practice, but instead on exploring the details of facilitators in action; thus her methodology consisted of an in-depth conversational analysis of facilitator communication as seen in the videotapes of the deliberative sessions.

To organize her observations, Blong (2008) built on Mansbridge et al.'s (2006) findings to develop some initial categories of expected moderator activity. She then applied the descriptive lens of the coordinated management of meaning (CMM), along with frame theory, to produce a thick description of how moderators of National Issues Forum conversations managed the process of small-group deliberation. In her findings, Blong (2008) used frame theory to point out the distinction between the role of the moderator within the frame of the forum, where they are responsible for ensuring a timely and productive conversation, and the role of the moderator within the frame of the deliberative conversation itself, where they are supposed to be a "neutral outside observer" who is not part of the conversation but instead encouraging a free flow among participants. While touching on the ways these two roles can reinforce and support one another (as part of a "charmed loop," p. 145), Blong's main focus was on the tensions between the two (as part of a "strange loop," p. 142). In Blong's words, the moderators

> worked very hard to make the deliberative conversations happen, but in some important ways, the more they did, the more difficult it became for participants to take control of their interaction, to self-regulate, and to talk to one another. On the other hand, […] the moderators' guidance worked to make the interaction more deliberative even if less […] conversational. (p. 146)

Blong (2008) explores the implications of her findings for practitioners, for deliberative theory, and for the design of deliberative fora. She invites readers to consider the trade-offs between two competing goals. On the one hand, the NIF forums have an ideal of having direct and self-regulated interactions between members of a public. At the same time, they also hold the ideal of having a more deliberative conversation — one with careful consideration of both costs and benefits, and/or, the taking on of other perspectives. Blong observes that these features of more deliberative conversation can be enhanced by more active facilitator moves (p. 148) – yet these moves run afoul of the ideal of "self-regulated interactions."

This tension is similar to that described earlier by Mansbridge et al. (2006) between the participants' self-directedness and the quality of deliberation. Yet in addition to pointing out the potential trade-offs involved, Blong also highlights how these design choices become *invisible* when we overlook the role of the moderator in public deliberation initiatives, and instead look only at participant contributions (p. 149).

More on Moore: inherent tensions of the facilitator role. Although Moore (2012) does not reference Blong's work, he asks a question that aligns with her study: "How do facilitators in practice manage the tension between necessarily initiating and eliciting discourse, and yet not directing or dominating it?" (p. 154). As part of his exploration of the "paradox of actively conducting a deliberation such that it seems to emerge naturally" (p. 155), Moore delves into Mansbridge et al.'s (2006) earlier comments about this tension, while contributing his own meaning (as well as his own metaphors) to describe this process.

As Moore (2012) sees it, the central tension in the role of the facilitator of deliberative processes is that although he or she "necessarily occupies a leadership position in the deliberating group," at the same time, he or she must "follow the group as it unfolds its own discourse on the issue at hand." The title of his work, "Following from the Front," has a great deal of resonance to those with a background in organization development, as it brings to mind the helpful construct of "servant leadership" (Eva et al., 2019.) Yet Moore (2012) makes it clear that he does *not* see the tensions or paradoxes that he explores as "mute contradictions," but instead as "lively and constitutive tensions that have to be managed by reflexive facilitators" (p. 147). This perspective is a long way from simply "making sure that everyone has a turn to speak." Moore concludes with the hope that his work has shown that "the practice of facilitation is worth further analysis and investigation by deliberative democrats" (p. 158).

Situating my dissertation within the larger flow. Before continuing to explore additional literature, I want to emphasize that the intentions of this research are to engage the reflexive facilitators of the Austrian Citizens' Councils in conversations about their work, and the sense they make of it. This goal includes, yet is not limited to, the tensions they manage within the work. My initial expectation was that practitioners would have thoughtful and meaningful contributions to offer that would contribute to the literature on the role of facilitation in deliberative democracy. In contrast to looking for patterns in facilitators' assessments of video recordings to determine their beliefs of what makes for good facilitation of deliberative events (Mansbridge et al., 2006), or analyzing video recordings to discern facilitators' communication patterns as they facilitate deliberative events within one particular format (Blong, 2008), or engaging in a meta-analysis of both theory and empirical studies (Moore, 2012), I followed

Forester in eliciting facilitator narratives about their own work experiences. Furthermore, I engaged directly with the facilitators in meaning-making about these narratives.

Variation Among Facilitator Styles

Another thread in the early work on facilitation within the field of deliberative democracy has to do with the significant differences among facilitators -- even among those who are practicing within the same format or tradition – and the effects that these differences can have on participants, and thus on the deliberative quality of the event.

A continuum of facilitator styles. The same year that Mansbridge et al. published their study, Ryfe (2006) published his research on the use and function of narrative within small deliberative forums. Rather than simply focusing on measuring attitude change pre and post deliberation, as had been customary until then, Ryfe was interested in the different *kinds* of communication that actually took place, *within* small-group deliberative forums — including both "rational reason-giving" forms of communication as well as more narrative forms. In so doing, he also reported some of his observations of how group communication was influenced by facilitator style.

Like Blong, Ryfe (2006) observed recoded sessions of National Issues Forum conversations. He described how participants use narrative structures to convey a sense of identity with regard to the issue at hand, to lend credibility to their claims, and to create a tone of civility and friendliness, thus lowering "structural, psychological, and social barriers to deliberation" (p. 80). He also showed how stories are used to stake moral claims, and how competing narratives are used by participants to disagree with others in a face-saving manner.

Working with a small sample size of five different videotaped forums, Ryfe observed a connection between the style of facilitation and the amount of narrative in the session. He described "strong facilitators" as ones who "ask leading questions, summarize the statements of

others, and otherwise place themselves at the center of group discussion," and reported that the two groups who experienced "strong facilitation" had a more "rapid-fire, scattershot quality," where participants told fewer stories and did less "thinking-out-loud" (pp. 87-88).

On the other end of the continuum, Ryfe (2006) described "weak facilitators" as mainly serving a time-keeping function, while also "summarizing the options discussed by participants" (p. 87). He saw a connection between their overall reticence and the fact that in those groups, "participants tend to make longer statements, to do more thinking out loud, to respond to one another's utterances, and generally to develop a richer narrative texture to their talk" (p. 88).

Yet while his valorization of narrative could be seen as an endorsement of a "weak" facilitation style, Ryfe (2006) cautioned that small groups have a demonstrated tendency toward premature consensus. Thus, he recommended that "facilitators must be trained to occupy a middle ground between strong and weak moderation." While they should initially step back in order to "induce participants to share and engage with one anothers' stories," they should also be ready and willing to "call attention to emerging narrative themes, to intervene with contradictory information when a conversation threaten to devolve into self-congratulation, and generally to prod the group to remain open to alternative accounts" (p. 89).

Blong (2008) situated her work as building on Ryfe's work, given her own interest in exploring the communication patterns within groups as well as the influence of the facilitator or moderator on those patterns. Yet rather than simply recommending that facilitators take a middle ground between holding back and being actively involved, as Ryfe had, Blong carried out an in-depth exploration of the facilitator's role, focusing more on the similarities in their function rather than on the differences between them. As mentioned earlier, she focused on the tension created by valuing participants' self-directedness while also valuing the higher quality of

deliberation that results from more active facilitator involvement — the same tension noted earlier by Mansbridge et al. and explored further by Moore.

Effects of facilitators on discourse quality. Building on Blong's and Ryfe's work, Dillard (2013) conducted another in-depth study of NIF facilitators. Using the categories Blong had generated from her thickly descriptive discourse analysis, Dillard arranged for coders to rate the frequency of various discursive tools that facilitators employed, while also carefully tracking *when* in the session these strategies were occurring. Designing her study to track differences among facilitators along the lines that Ryfe had begun to map out, Dillard writes that the facilitators in her study "were chosen because they most clearly reflect Ryfe's ideas of weak-to-strong facilitation," and her goal was to "add some complexity to Ryfe's descriptions" (p. 219). She began by renaming Ryfe's categories of strong and weak as involved and passive, and formalizing his middle ground category mentioned above as moderate.

Dillard (2013) found that while passive facilitators did not necessarily take fewer turns than moderate facilitators, their turns were more focused on "traffic direction" (i.e., helping ensure participant turn-taking). They rarely engaged in higher-order interventions aimed at improving the deliberative quality of the conversation, such as asking the group to consider other perspectives, summarizing, or linking statements to previous contributions. As a possible consequence, in those groups "the discussion lacked strategic focus or a discussion of trade-offs" (p. 225)[18]

In contrast, more directive, involved moderators offered a greater number of follow-up questions, summarizing statements, and connecting statements that served to link any off-topic conversations back to the theme of the forum. As a possible result of these interventions, there

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[18]Interestingly, in a counterpoint to Ryfe's findings, in one of the passive facilitation groups Dillard found little storytelling, which suggests that passive facilitation may not be sufficient to encourage narrative contributions.

was more in-depth conversation about value tensions within the topic being explored and "the group had a more succinct deliberation that led to a conclusion" (Dillard, 2013, p. 226).

Somewhere in the middle were the moderate facilitators, who Dillard (2013) characterizes as employing a "power-sharing approach" (p. 228). Although those groups were not as efficient at reaching conclusions, they were marked by a greater sense of ownership of the process. The moderators posed "tough questions" from time to time to challenge the group's thinking, while largely encouraging the group to self-direct (p. 230).

Dillard (2013) viewed her findings as confirming that "facilitators are indeed integral to the deliberative process" (p.230). Contrary to the inactive way in which facilitation is often framed, she pointed out that *the way* facilitators structure communicative interactions is key for encouraging participants to engage constructively with differences. Citing both her own observations as well as others' findings on how active facilitation affects discursive quality, Dillard proposed that future researchers include facilitation as intervening variable whenever they are researching participants' deliberative functioning. She also noted that previous research had examined participants' attitudinal sophistication, schematic organization, and opinion certainty without looking at the facilitator's influence on these measures. Given variances in deliberative outcomes, Dillard (2013) recommended that researchers develop more in-depth models and a more nuanced vocabulary to account for influence of facilitators upon those variances. Thus, Dillard built on Blong's earlier conclusion that "studying what moderators do and say may be pivotal to building our understanding of public deliberation initiatives and the discussions that are their aim" (Blong, 2008, p. 148).

More parallels and contrasts with my own work. Three of the four researchers described above (Blong, Ryfe, and Dillard) focused their work on National Issues Forums, a widely used

format in the US for public deliberation. The NIF sessions are designed as 2-hour sessions in which self-selected participants explore a particular topic with the help of an issue guide (Melville et al., 2005). These valuable NIF gatherings to explore policy issues have been taking place throughout the country since 1981, inspired by Daniel Yankelovitch's insights about the capacity of ordinary people to make thoughtful value choices with regard to social policies (Melville & Kingston, 2010).[19]

The extensive research conducted on the outcomes of NIF sessions shows that as participants engage in listening to one another's perspectives, creating a shared narrative, and finding common ground for action, their views often expand into a greater appreciation for the complexity of the issues. In addition to broadening participants' outlooks, participating in these forums also helps participants develop greater confidence and skills in participating in groups, enhances their sense of political agency, broadens their sense of their own self-interest, helps them move from superficial preferences to considered public judgments, and leads to higher levels of public engagement (Melville et al., 2005).

In contrast to the NIF 2-hour sessions, the Austrian Citizens' Councils are usually between 1.5 and 2 days in length. And instead of being open to the public, participation in the initial council stage is by sortition, through a public lottery designed to generate a diverse sample of ordinary people[20]. The intention of these councils is to explore a particular issue in depth, as well

[19] In his work as a public opinion researcher, Yankelovitch (1991) discovered a distinction between momentary public opinions on the one hand, and on the other, the more stable, coherent, and accountable views with regard to specific issues that he termed "public judgment." His particular focus is how community members can be supported in the developmental process of reaching public judgment with regard to an issue, something he called "working through" and which he felt happens best in a social context.

[20] Given that participation in the NIF deliberative forums is open to the public (anyone can choose to sign up for a session) NIF forums might qualify as "mini-publics" only with the more expansive definitions of the term (see, e.g., Archon Fung ,"Recipes for Public Spheres," 2003), whereas the intermediate and strict definitions of the term require some sort of sortition-based process (Ryan & Smith, 2014). Nonetheless, the NIF's focus on bringing in ordinary citizens to explore public issues in a facilitated context means that they have some significant parallels with the *Bürgerräte*.

as to discover some common ground and produce recommendations on a particular issue. Their outcomes are then shared at a public meeting, where the council sponsors (public officials and public administrators) can get a sense of how these recommendations are likely to land with others. These councils are, by design, closely linked with a decision-making system, as the intention is for their outcomes to inform public policy. Although there is little research on these Citizens' Councils available in the English language[21], especially in comparison to the extensive research that has been done to date on the National Issues Forum, the findings from the evaluations of Citizens' Councils that have been conducted thus far (Büro für Zukunftsfragen, 2014; Strele, 2012) echo the kind of benefits that NIF reports.

Just as the studies of NIF facilitators showed differences among the facilitation styles of NIF-trained facilitators, there are undoubtedly differences among facilitators who work with Dynamic Facilitation in the context of Citizens' Councils. Yet exploring those differences has *not* been the principal emphasis of my work. Instead, I have been looking primarily for commonalities, as in the Mansbridge et al. (2006) study. Also, instead of viewing videotapes of facilitators in action, as in the four studies described above, I conducted individual interviews with the facilitators themselves, as well as a small focus group where some of the facilitators had the opportunity to engage in dialogue with one another.

An additional and significant difference with the NIF studies is the particular facilitation approach used in these Citizens' Councils, Dynamic Facilitation. This method intentionally welcomes emotion, encourages creativity, and has a distinctive empathy-based approach for working with conflict (Büro für Zukunfstfragen, 2014; Trattnigg & Haderlapp, 2014). It is highly

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[21] A few significant exceptions to this, as mentioned in the first chapter, include Trattnigg & Haderlapp, 2014; Asenbaum 2016; Toth, 2017; Zubizarreta et al., 2020.

active in that the facilitator offers a great deal of ‘reflecting back” to each participant, while at the same time highly non-directive in that the facilitator does not guide the direction of the conversation. Thus, it is orthogonal to Dillard’s categories as described above.

Contextualizing My Research

There appears to be substantial acknowledgment in the field that the role of the facilitator can have a significant impact with regard to how much emotion is welcomed, how much room is made for diverse perspectives, and how disagreements are managed (Polletta & Gardner, 2018; Beauvais, 2018; Landwehr, 2014; Forester & Kahane, 2010). Yet with the exception of Forester’s work (1999, 2009, 2013, 2018), which has been primarily with multi-stakeholder mediations, there has been scant research on *how* this happens, especially within the context of mini-publics. Thus, the intention of this exploratory research is to offer some contributions in these areas. In my initial pilot study (discussed further in the next chapter) I found that the themes of welcoming emotions and diverse perspectives, as well as the creative management of disagreement, emerged inductively in facilitators’ stories of memorable moments; subsequent interviews continued this pattern.

To contextualize my research findings, I identified some of the work in deliberative democracy with regard to the role of emotion and empathy in deliberation and public participation (Erfan, 2017; Scudder, 2016; Morrell, 2010; Harvey, 2009), the role of difference, disagreement, and conflict in deliberation (Young, 2000; Black, 2012; Black, 2013; Black & Wiederhold, 2014; Adams, 2015; Sprain & Black, 2018), and the role of creativity in deliberative processes (Nishiyama et al., 2020; Forester, 2018; Gordon et al., 2017). Although not all of these authors make explicit mention of the facilitator’s role, these areas are ones that are usually acknowledged as being influenced by the presence and activity of the facilitator.

Setting up the loom. In addition to identifying the above set of threads – working with emotion and empathy, welcoming differences, and engaging creatively with conflict – I also began with locating three running themes as the "warp threads" for this study. One has to do with our assumptions or working theories regarding *how can we best arrive at useful truths together.* This seems to me to be an epistemological question; the "narrative turn" in deliberation theory and research mentioned earlier (Ryfe, 2006; Polletta & Gardner, 2018, pp. 74-78) is one example of how there can be different answers to the broader question of how to arrive at useful truths together. Also relevant here is the "dialogical turn" in deliberative democracy, as detailed by Burkhalter et al. (2002, pp. 407-411); other substantive explorations of dialogue in deliberative democracy include Spano (2001, 2006), Barge (2002), Pearce (2010), Escobar (2011), Polletta & Chen (2013), and Escobar et al. (2014).[22]

A second warp thread has to do with power and leadership, and their role in the work of arriving at useful truths together. The tensions around the power of the facilitator's role in the context of deliberative democracy -- tensions clearly encapsulated in Moore's metaphor of "following from the front" (2014) as well as in earlier work by Mansbridge et al. (2006) and Blong (2008) – raise larger questions about power. In addition to general contributions on theories of power in the context of deliberation (Holdo, 2019; Mansbridge et al., 2010; Hendriks, 2009; Kadlic & Friedman, 2007; Pellizzoni, 2001) and working with power differences (Heath, 2018), I also found useful contributions on the role of leadership in deliberation from the

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[22] Although discussed more widely in earlier literature, the 2018 *Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy* does not include "dialogue" in its index. One article (Gastil & Black) includes a subsection called "Deliberative and Dialogic Designs," with little specific mention of the value of dialogue in that section. Might it be that the work of this particular "turn" has been fulfilled, such that dialogue as a part of deliberation is now the new normal and thus no longer in need of explicit mention? Alternatively, could it be that given the current emphasis in the field on measuring and evaluating deliberation, there is now much less emphasis on dialogue since it can be much harder to measure? In any case, it was interesting to notice its absence in the recent *Handbook*.

perspective of deliberation as pedagogy (Nishiyama et al, 2020; Prosser et al, 2018; Kosnoski, 2005).

Last but by no means least, the third warp thread is the role of listening, another greatly understudied topic within deliberative democracy until quite recently. Mansbridge and Latura's "The Polarization Crisis in the United States and the Future of Listening" (2016) traces the current emphasis on listening back to Benjamin Barber's *Strong Democracy* (1984), which they identify as "one of the first books in political science to stress the value of listening." In *The Other Side of Language* (1990), philosopher and psychotherapist Gemma Corradi Fiumara writes about how listening has been vastly undertheorized in Western thought with its unbalanced emphasis on "logos" as speaking; Bickford's *The Dissonance of Democracy*: *Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship* (1996) builds on both Barber's and Fiumara's work. The recent listening turn within cultural studies (Dreher, 2009) emphasizes the value of being heard, and how this differs from having an opportunity to speak; Dobson's *Listening for Democracy* (2014) refers to both Dreher and Fiumara.

One of the most recent contributions on listening and democracy is Scudder's *Beyond Empathy and Inclusion: The Challenge of Listening in Democratic Deliberation* (2020). Yet this in-depth book on listening and deliberative theory barely mentions the role of the facilitator or moderator. This omission is somewhat understandable given that Scudder's (2020) focus is *not* listening within the context of mini-publics, but instead "promoting listening in broad and diffuse public spheres" (p.117). However, as Dobson (2014) points out, if we want to promote listening, we would do well to "draw on the experience of professions in which listening is already regarded as important" (p.176). Dobson wrote this in the context of designing listening trainings

for public officials; yet if we want to promote listening in the public sphere, it could likewise be helpful to draw on the expertise of those who listen professionally.

It seems that much remains to be done in the study of facilitation within the field of deliberative democracy. I hope to help fill that gap.

Facilitators as Public Participation Professionals[23]

Thus far, I have described some of the main work that has been done in exploring "what facilitators do in the room." I will conclude by mentioning some authors who have explored other aspects of the work that professional facilitators do, before and after the sessions they facilitate, as well as the roles they play in the growth and development of democratic innovations.

Escobar (2015, 2017) conducted 2 years of ethnographic research shadowing public participation practitioners in Scotland, employed by the Scottish government as a result of the community planning policy. He makes some useful distinctions between the work that facilitators do "on stage,",and their preparatory and follow-up work "back stage." Prior to Escobar's work, Cooper and Smith (2012) conducted in-depth interviews with professional participation practitioners in Germany and England to explore their perspectives on the field, while Chilvers (2008) engaged in a similar process with participatory process experts in the UK who conduct public engagement processes related to science and technology.

A strongly critical voice in the US has been Lee (2015), who used ethnographic methods to conduct a 5-year sociological study of professionals in what she calls the growing "public engagement industry." She worries that these professionals' good intentions are in vain, given

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[23] In 2017, Bherer et al. edited a noteworthy book, *The Professionalization of Public Participation*, which has significantly promoted the use of this terminology (originally formulated by Chilvers, 2012) for describing these professionals.

that she views their efforts as containing needed protest and instead creating "more of itself rather than more mobilization" (p.28). Lee is particularly concerned about the "progressive, non-commercial, pro-community connotations of deliberation," as she thinks they portray a false compatibility between "administrative authority and grassroots empowerment" (pp. 184-185).

In contrast, although valuing critique, Dzur (2019) cautions about the "corrosive effects" (p. 118) of an overemphasis on the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (pp. 122 - 134). Instead, he offers empowering accounts of professionals within the fields of education, criminal justice, and public administration who are creating various on-the-ground experiments in collaborative governance. In discussing my findings, I will explore where the findings from my research build on, amplify, or contrast with the findings of these studies, with regard to facilitators' larger role in the work of democracy.

This, then, is the bulk of the literature in deliberative democracy, democratic innovations, and empowered participatory governance that I have been drawing on to contextualize my research findings; I have also drawn on some work in the fields of planning, public administration, mediation, and education. In addition to interviewing facilitators about their own experiences while facilitating these councils, I was also interested to discover what emerges when these facilitators have the opportunity to reflect with one another about their practice and their experiences, within the context of a facilitated focus group. My larger intention has been to contribute to the growing literature on facilitators and group facilitation in the context of democratic innovations. In the next chapter, I describe my methodology.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The "conversion of implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge" mentioned earlier (Nonaka's model of knowledge creation as described in Rynes et al., 2001) can be seen as a general description of what we do as qualitative researchers, whenever we interview practitioners, write up our findings, and publish them. At the same time, another conversion metaphor can offer us a sobering perspective. In our present-day extractive economy, labor and natural resources are converted into capital, yet it is the capital that is held in high regard, not the labor and natural resources upon which they depend. In a similar way, the explicit knowledge that is written in books and validated by degrees has been historically held in high regard, while the implicit knowledge of practitioners upon which it depends has often been devalued (Schön, 1983, pp. 30-49). Thus, research methodologies have political implications.

I knew from the start that I wanted to model my research on the practitioner profiles or "practice stories" format that John Forester developed, and which he then used as the basis for many of his books and articles (1999, 2013, 2009). Forester's work communicates a deep respect for the practice knowledge that experienced practitioners have, and helps build bridges between the worlds of practice and theory that can be helpful for both academics and other practitioners. At the same time, I was initially thinking, for various reasons, that I would be working with practitioner narratives within the larger context of action research (AR).

Exploring Action Research

The tradition of action research intentionally attempts to shift the extractive dynamics of conventional knowledge production that I described above. According to

Ormston et al. (2014), AR is "based on a collaborative approach with participants and aimed at enacting positive change for those involved" (p. 19). A succinct description of the epistemological perspective of action research is found in Lewin's conviction that we can best learn about the world by attempting to change it (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p.9). My four rationales for wanting to choose an action research framework:

AR's orientation to catalyzing societal change. In Citizens' Councils, participants are attempting to influence change in their local communities by discovering authentic common ground from which to make their policy recommendations. The role of the facilitators of these councils is to support the council participants in making change. In a parallel process, I see my work as a researcher as offering professional facilitators an opportunity to reflect upon their work, thus providing a context where they could deepen and strengthen their own abilities to create change.

AR's orientation to participation and agency. Citizens' Councils are designed to support the participation and agency of community members in the generation of public policy. Thus, I wanted to engage in a parallel process by supporting the participation and agency of research participants ("co-researchers" from an AR perspective). My research design emphasized agency by inviting facilitation professionals to choose a meaningful moment from one of the councils they had facilitated, to describe within the research interview. After they shared their narrative and responded to various clarification questions, I then invited them to take a step back from their own story, and explore what meaning they themselves saw in it. In addition, the participants in the focus group had the opportunity to engage in collaborative meaning-making with one another.

AR's commitment to embodying democracy. As mentioned earlier, Citizens' Councils are a recent manifestation of a larger movement toward participatory democracy. AR has inherent ties to democracy, as it centers the "collaborative, *democratic* partnership" between researchers and research participants, who are called co-researchers (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 4, italics added), These ties to democracy are manifested in the "industrial democracy" tradition of AR elaborated most fully in Scandinavia (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, pp. 15-31), as well as participatory action research practices (PAR) initially arising in the less industrialized southern hemisphere or "Global South" (pp. 173-185). While different research methodologies can be used to study democratic innovations, I sought a framework with an explicitly democratic orientation.

My own professional background. I earned my master's degree in organization development in a highly experiential program at Sonoma State University, where we were trained in action research *as an intervention* to support the growth and development of teams within organizations, in a participatory and inclusive manner. During our training, the academic or scholarly aspect of AR was not foregrounded. Yet in the process of completing a doctoral program, I realized that the practical skills gained through facilitating collaborative change processes are also essential for facilitating a more research-oriented AR study (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, pp. 101-110) and was drawn to the opportunity to engage in action research as a researcher.

Reconsidering My Initial Methodological Frame

When looking initially at the question of what *kind* of action research this would be, I found a substantial body of work on engaging in AR within organizations; there is

also another distinct body of work on engaging with geographic communities of marginalized peoples using PAR. I saw my own research as closest to a third category: researchers working with AR to engage with professionals within a given field of practice (e.g., Lee-Kelley & Turner, 2017; Kilbride et al., 2011) since one of my hoped-for outcomes was to strengthen the emergent community of practitioners by sharing their reflections on their own practice and supporting the dissemination of local innovations.

However, in the course of my work on this project, I became concerned about the limitations of the dissertation time frame, with regard to completing the multiple cycles of planning -- taking action -- observing the outcomes – reflecting on outcomes for planning a new cycle of action, that are widely understood as constituting in-depth action research (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 5). One could consider that the initial planning-action-reflection cycle I have completed here, consists of the planning I have done on my own as a researcher, reviewing and documenting the need for more facilitator voices in democracy research; the action has been inviting facilitators' voices, by means of the participatory interviews and the focus group, the outcomes of which are described in the next chapter; and the reflection will be in the final chapter, where I mention my plans for a new cycle of action, post-dissertation, that involves sharing the outcomes of this cycle to spark subsequent conversation with research participants and other facilitators. In that sense, this project could be described as a qualitative research dissertation that is setting the stage for a larger, post-dissertation, action research project.

However, I realized that I needed to narrow my focus for now to the work involved in this dissertation, without reference to any possible future cycles; that meant that the larger umbrella of action research was not as good of a fit as I had initially

thought. So then the question became, even while I remained committed to practitioner narratives as a research method, what would I choose as the "larger umbrella" of my research methodology? Forester sees his own work as a "practice-focused oral history strategy," as he himself was deeply inspired by Studs Terkel's work (Forester, 2012; 2015, p. 147.) Yet I felt the need to look further, and so began to search for other research that cited Forester's work.

One significant breakthrough was coming across the work of Sonia Ospina, a researcher in the field of public administration who used Forester-inspired practitioner narratives as part of a larger action research project, and has written several articles on narrative inquiry in public administration. In an article for the *Sage Encyclopedia of Action Research*, Ospina & Anderson (2014) wrote about AR as part of a broader "action turn" in social science, described as "taking seriously the connections between experience, human participation, and the generation of knowledge" (p. 19). This clarified for me that the practitioner narratives as first modeled by Forester and used since by others (examples include Peters & Hittleman, 2003; Peters et al., 2004; Schusler et al, 2009; Schusler & Krasny, 2010; Laws & Forester, 2015) could be seen as part of this broader action turn, even when not used as part of a larger action research project. For the practitioners whose work Forester highlights, and also for the practitioners whom I have interviewed for this research, the reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983) intrinsic to their practice has been key to their knowledge-in-action; in turn, "narratives carry practical knowledge that individuals have gained through their experience" (Dodge et al., 2005, p. 290). Harvesting these practice stories can help us to "illuminate tacit knowledge or to share theories in use that are implied in the stories and

embedded in the accounts of practice" (p. 292). Thus, working with practitioner narratives is a way that both researchers and practitioners can learn from other practitioners' experiences, allowing action and theory to inform one another.

Narrative Inquiry and Practitioner Narratives

In Ospina and her colleagues' approach to narrative inquiry, storytelling is the focal point of data collection and analysis, allowing us to obtain greater insight and understanding than we might through using only other approaches such as surveys or questionnaires. Instead, inquiry that elicits in-depth stories places greater emphasis on "understanding intention and action rather than just explaining behavior" (Ospina & Dodge, 2005a, p. 146). Jeon-Hee Kim (2016), another author in the field of narrative inquiry, describes how narrative inquiry has developed within the fields of psychology, law, medicine, and education, in ways that include both common features as well as significant variegations (pp. 10-19). Ospina and Dodge (2005a) focus more specifically on the need for and the growing use of narrative inquiry within public administration, while also mentioning its applications in political science, organization and management theory, and economics (p. 144). They advocate for a pluralistic approach for the field of public administration scholarship, where the insights of narrative inquiry can "complement, add, and sometimes challenge" those provided by other approaches to research, thus "offering opportunities for constructive conversation among researchers of different orientations" (p. 153); I share this intention for my own research.

It was especially through the writings of Ospina and her colleagues that I came to consider the usefulness of narrative inquiry as a larger methodological frame for this particular project. Using their own research on leadership in social-change organizations

and movements as a way to illustrate narrative inquiry, Ospina and Dodge (2005a) describe how they decided to study their subject "from the inside out" by inviting "the people engaged in the work to inquiry about its meaning" (p. 150.) I see strong parallels between their orientation and what I am doing in this dissertation, given that I have sought to study the facilitation of a particular democratic innovation "from the inside out" by inviting the professionals who facilitate this practice (some of whom are public administrators) to share their practice stories and the meaning they make from them.

At the same time, my project also differs methodologically in some significant respects from that of Ospina and her colleagues (2008), which was designed as narrative inquiry *within* a larger action research framework. Most significantly I did *not* invite the participants to engage in process of interpretation and analysis within this dissertation cycle, outside of the individual interviews (where they had the opportunity to interpret their own narratives) and the focus group. Yet even without the larger framework of action research, narrative inquiry offers significant potential for bridging theory and practice. As Ospina and Dodge (2005a) write, "Narrative inquiry is appropriate for learning about social phenomena in context because it allows people to tell stories that reflect the richness and complexity of their experience"; these stories reflect the research participants' "point of reference and voice," while also creating openings for tapping into "local knowledges" (p. 151-155). In turn, Jeong-Hee Kim (2016) draws on Foucault and Deleuze to illuminate how "theory requires our experiences derived from practice, and our experiences require theorizing through which we make sense of our lives, experiences, and practices" (pp. 29-31.) Yet this is not inherently a post-modern insight;

Mansbridge (2003) makes much the same point when she writes that "the old formula, 'practice-thought-practice', works best if repeated over and over (p. 175).

In truth, as I struggled to connect with much of the literature on narrative inquiry in other fields, I realized that most of that literature comes from a post-modernist orientation; whereas I am myself much more aligned with Paula Moya's (2002) post-positivist realism, where objectivity is seen as an "ideal of inquiry necessarily involving theoretical bias and interest," *instead of* a more positivist "condition of absolute and achieved certainty that is context transcendent, subject independent, and free of theoretical bias" (2002, p. 14.) One of the values of post-positivist realism, Moya writes, is that it offers room for her to "justify my commitments with reference to a normative conception of the human good – one that I am willing to interrogate, and if necessary, revise" (p. 15.)

To me, Moya's approach resonates with Mannheim's work in *Ideology and Utopia* (1936/1985) where he examines the implications of the pervasiveness of ideology (akin to what today we call confirmation bias). Mannheim wrote that "only when we are thoroughly aware of the limited scope of every point of view are we on the road to the sought-after comprehension of the whole" (p. 105). In my reading of Mannheim, this "sought-after comprehension of the whole" is an asymptote to which we can usefully aspire, while never reaching. Similarly, Moya (2002) writes of the quest for objectivity as "an ideal of inquiry rather than as an achieved condition," an "ongoing process involving the careful analysis of the different kinds of subjective or theoretical bias and interest through which humans apprehend the world" (p. 14).

Part of the value of this ongoing process of arriving at shared truths together is that it can inspire us to hold major shifts in perspective as inevitable and indeed beneficial. In exploring his insights on the pervasiveness of ideology, Mannheim (1936/1985) wrote, “That reason can penetrate more profoundly into its own structure is not a sign of intellectual bankruptcy. Nor is it to be regarded as intellectual incompetence on our part when an extraordinary broadening of perspective necessitates a thoroughgoing revision of our fundamental conceptions” (p. 105).[24] While academic researchers may not often live up to this ideal (Kuhn, 1962) it remains a worthy direction to strive toward; and as we shall see, it also applicable to the experiences that take place within the Citizens’ Councils, as we shall see in some of the narratives in Chapter 4.

Grounded Normative Theory

This acknowledgment of my own bias toward post-positivist realism brings me to grounded normative theory (as distinct from grounded theory), a new framing I first encountered in the work of Genevieve Fuji Johnson (2023) in a book on research methods in deliberative democracy. Following Brooke Ackerly et al., Johnson identifies “grounded normative theory” as an effort to include *both* practice and theory within deliberative theory-making. In their original article on this subject, Ackerly et al. (2021) offer this new descriptive category as a way to draw attention to significant features of some existing work in normative political theory, which have been grounded on significant lived experience – and also, to call for *more* normative theory that is similarly

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[24] In previous research (Zubizarreta, 2020) I learned that the early work of sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, one of the creators of Black feminist standpoint epistemology, was influenced by reading Mannheim. I like to imagine that Mannheim, whose wife Julia Lang collaborated closely with him in many of his works, would have welcomed feminist thinking, especially Collins’ Black feminist standpoint epistemology, as one such “extraordinary broadening of perspective.”

grounded on an empirical basis. For some researchers, an empirical basis would be very narrowly construed as “controlled experiments” only. Others hold that “narrative inquiry in the social sciences is a form of empirical narrative in which empirical data and theory are key elements in the work” (Moen, 2006, p. 64.) Following the latter, I hope to contribute to the evolution of normative theory with regard to mini-publics, theory that is grounded in the interpretation of empirical practitioner narratives.

In addition to the methodologies (and underlying epistemologies) mentioned above, other ways of categorizing research are also relevant. For instance, Ritchie and Ornstron (2014) categorize the potential functions of *any* social research as either contextual, explanatory, evaluative, or generative (p. 31, emphasis added.) Within that framework, the intention of this particular research project can be seen as generative, as it aims to aid in "the development of theories, strategies, or actions" (p. 31).

Another purpose-driven description of research comes from Bevir and Bowman (2018). In their chapter on “Qualitative Assessment of Deliberation,” these authors intentionally eschew the term “methodology,” preferring to use “assessment”; they describe three different approaches to qualitative assessment of deliberate participation, offering an in-depth example of each. What all three have in common, Bevir and Bowman point out, is a commitment to “problem-driven research” as an alternative to “method-driven” or “theory-driven” research. While all three instances add to our general understanding, their intention is not “theory building as such,” but rather, “*learning from historical experience to make future action more successful and intelligent*” (p. 693, emphasis in the original). My appreciation of this framing inspired me to describe more explicitly the “problem” I am addressing with this study: facilitation is essential to many

democratic innovations, yet largely understudied. In response, my approach has been, *let's hear first-hand from facilitators of the Austrian Citizens' Councils, as a source of knowledge and insight for how to improve future action*.

Methods and Tools: Interviewing to Elicit Practice Narratives

In Forester's practice stories tradition, there are specific ways that researchers approach the interviewing process; Schusler and Krasny (2010) used Forester's interviewing approach in their research, describing it as "not to ask what someone thinks of an abstract concept," but instead, "to ask how the narrator approached, handled, or responded to a relevant, practical situation" (p. 212). Citing Forester, they emphasize that "asking what someone thinks of a topic will result in their views, intent, or espoused theories," while "asking how someone acted in a specific situation is far more likely to result in an instructive story of practice that illuminates not only general beliefs but also practical considerations, opportunities, challenges, supports, barriers, conflict, complexity, and passion" (p. 212).

In the individual interviews, I began by asking participants to choose a particularly meaningful moment in a council, and then asked questions about what had led up to that moment, probed for specific details about how the facilitator had responded, and asked about what happened afterward. Thus the interviews became guided, co-constructed conversations, as described in Schusler et al. (2009, p. 114-115).

My inspiration for asking about "meaningful moments" initially sprang from having encountered Cissna and Anderson's *Moments of Meeting: Buber, Rogers, and the Potential for Public Dialogue* (2002) years ago, and was strengthened by work on dialogic moments (Black, 2008) and work on deliberative moments (Sprain & Black,

2018). My sense was that those “moments of meeting” might be particularly rich and memorable, and thus form a useful kernel for eliciting a larger story. It was only after I had conducted the interviews that I found Laws’ article, “What use is a critical moment?” (2020), where he explores the value of critical moments for reconstructing cases and developing detailed narratives. A colleague of Forester’s, Laws is intimately familiar with Forester’s approach to practice narratives and writes about it eloquently. With regard to the practitioners whose stories we elicit, Laws (2020) writes that “critical moments are the moments that grounded their subjective experience of a conflict, their evaluation of behavior, their sense of what was possible, and the experiences of surprise in which the above changed, often unexpectedly” (p. 109).

While seeing these critical moments as indispensable for the process of eliciting thick narratives about practice, especially as they stimulate greater recall of the situation in which they arose, Laws (2020) points out that the interviewer still has much work to do:

> To get a story that is revealing of the experience of an accomplished practitioner or a stakeholder in the midst of a conflict, one must be able to enter with them into the story and, also, to stand sufficiently outside it to push for the details, examples, and connections that will help respondents render the kind of story that will push them, and others, to new insights into the nature of their work (p. 112).

The above descriptions resonated deeply with my own experience of conducting the research interviews; as the research participants responded to my prompts and went further into the narratives, they indeed began to recall more details. As I nudged for further “details, examples, and connections,” my intention as an interviewer was to elicit a richer phenomenological description, as a way of bringing others more fully into their experience.

I want to end this section with a clarification about levels of narrative: the inquiry I engaged in with the facilitators, in eliciting their practitioner narratives, was *not* primarily focused on the narratives that are shared by participants *within* the *Bürgerräte*. In these councils, participants engage in an expanded form of issue exploration which elicits various forms of discourse, including narratives. Yet while narratives are often shared by participants *within* the *Bürgerräte*, that was not the main focus of this project; instead, my focus has been eliciting and interpreting practice stories from the facilitators of these Councils, about their own experiences in their role as facilitators.

Other Research Tools: Focus Groups and Dynamic Facilitation

Within a larger project, different process tools can be used, depending on the context and situation. For example, Greenwood and Levin (2007) describe the use of a "search process" as one way to address the need for "constructing arenas for dialogue" within a larger project (pp. 153-172). Here, in addition to individual interviews, I also hosted and facilitated an online focus group as an arena for dialogue. Common to different kinds of research, focus groups can be used within participatory and action research with the intention "to empower and to foster social change" (Puchta & Potter, 2004, p. 7).

More generally, focus groups can be used in any kind of research whenever "the group process – the interaction between participants – will itself illuminate the research issue" and also when "what is required is creative thinking, solutions and strategies" (Lewis & Nicholls, 2014, p. 56). Finch et al. (2014) describe one of the distinctive features of focus groups as the mutual influence among group participants, who "listen, reflect on what is said, and in the light of this consider their own standpoint further" (p.

212); in the process, "individual response becomes sharper and refined, and moves to a deeper and more considered level" (p. 212). These are some of the reasons I included the use of focus groups in my initial design; while due to circumstances, I ended up only conducting one, the findings from it were quite meaningful.

Focus groups can be facilitated in different ways, partly reflecting the different purposes for which they are used: Fern (2001) distinguishes between exploratory, clinical, and experiential focus groups. For this exploratory project, I used a version of Dynamic Facilitation, a key element within the Citizens' Council model as described above; thus, all of the facilitators in my study were already familiar with this approach.

Another reason for using Dynamic Facilitation in the focus group was to explore its potential as a research tool. In a parallel manner to how "action research" can be practiced as an intervention, or else as an intervention *and* a research methodology, other approaches also hold these dual possibilities. For example, World Café can be used strictly as an organizational or community intervention, to support a larger group in having a productive conversation in smaller, recombinant groups; alternatively, it can also be used as a research methodology. Some researchers describe the World Café as a way of hosting knowledge co-production dialogues within a collaborative research process (Preller et al., 2017), or as a relationship-building approach that provides additional value to action research and appreciative inquiry orientations (Fouché & Light, 2011). Other researchers refer to the World Café as an enhanced focus group (O'Byrne & Muldoon, 2019), or as focus group format that promotes collaborative dialogue and active engagement (While et al., 2006); I see these different descriptions as potentially complementary rather than incompatible.

In a similar manner, Dynamic Facilitation has the potential to support a generative conversation in a research context– whether we regard it "constructing an arena for dialogue" for the co-creation of meaning, or as a particular approach to facilitating a focus group. Yet while this facilitation approach has shown its value as an intervention in organizational contexts and in deliberative democracy contexts, I have not yet found any research where it has been used explicitly as part of the research methods. Part of what inspired me to do so was prior communication with an established researcher who was interested in the potential of these councils as a qualitative research tool, and applied for a 5-year grant to conduct a multi-country study along these lines (personal communication, Friederiecke Miethe). In addition, there has been a general call for innovation with regard to approaches for helping heterogeneous focus groups work well (Morgan, 2017, pp. 416-417); thus, its inclusion as part of my research methods toolkit.

My experience with Dynamic Facilitation also influenced my approach to the individual interviews, where I used a significant amount of active listening and reflecting back in order to generate shared understanding. I was heartened whenever I witnessed my research participants' ease in correcting me whenever I had misunderstood, as this helped to strengthen my sense of the validity and reliability of this work; more on that below, after an exploration of positionality.

Acknowledging My Own Positionality

As researchers, acknowledging our positionality when engaging in any kind of research is appropriate at the outset. As researchers, we may have a multiplicity of roles with respect to a project; and each role, whether that of insider or outsider, brings its own set of opportunities and challenges. Being clear about our positionality during the various

phases of the project, and self-reflective about how that is impacting our work, is key to the effectiveness of our research (Herr & Anderson, 2015, 37-59); our own positionality becomes a reference from which to interpret and analyze information (Ospina & Dodge, 2005a, p. 247).

Due to my own role within the Dynamic Facilitation (DF) community as a practitioner, trainer, and author, in some ways my location vis-à-vis this project has been that of an insider. At the same time, given that I do not speak German nor live and practice in Austria, in those regards I am an outsider. Since my own practice of DF has been focused primarily on organizational applications, my prior experience with Citizens' Councils is quite limited. In that respect as well, I am an outsider. I had limited previous acquaintance with four of the European facilitators I interviewed, as a result of a few international practitioner gatherings I attended; seven of my research participants were completely new to me.

Herr and Anderson (2015) acknowledge how researchers can occupy "multiple positions that intersect and may bring us into conflicting allegiances or alliances within our research site." (p. 55). Yet this multiplicity is not only a challenge, but also a resource:

> We suggest that our obligation as researchers is to interrogate our multiple positionalities in relationship to the question under study. Our sense is that, in making explicit the tensions we experience as researchers in our varying roles and statuses, we have the possibility of crafting uniquely complex understandings of the research question. In addition, we hope to avoid the blind spots that come with unexamined beliefs. (p. 55)

In their manual for doing research in one's own organization, Coghlan and Brannick (2005) describe the advantages of being an "insider researcher" when it comes

to "pre-understanding", or the knowledge that one brings already before beginning the research project. At the same time, they also warn about the disadvantages of being an insider:

> When you are interviewing you may assume too much and so not probe as much as if you were an outsider or ignorant of the situation. You may think you know the answer and not expose your current thinking to alternative reframing. In insider research epistemic reflexivity is the constant analysis of your lived experience as well as your own theoretical and methodological presuppositions. (p. 62).

In a situation where one is an insider in some ways as well as an outsider in others, there can tendency to position one's self as an "outsider-within". Yet Herr and Anderson (2015) warn that "to downplay or fail to acknowledge one's insider or participatory status is deceptive and allows the researcher to avoid the kind of intense self-reflection that is the hallmark of good practitioner research" (p. 58). So one of the challenges as a researcher with this project has been to acknowledge and critically reflect in an ongoing manner on both of these roles. While an outsider in many ways, I am also an insider, a fellow facilitation practitioner familiar with many of the approaches that my research participants use in their work.

Overall Design: Purposeful Sampling and Data Collection

To find research participants, I used snowball sampling. I began by contacting the staff of the *Büro für Freiwilliges Engagement und Beteiligung* in Vorarlberg, who sent out information about the research project to all of the facilitators who contract with them. I also contacted Martina Handler and Rita Trattnigg, two facilitators I know who have facilitated many of these councils, and asked them who else I might contact. As part of the selection process, I asked for participants who had facilitated at least two

Bürgerräte within the last 10 years, and who were comfortable speaking English in addition to German, as the interviews and focus group were to be conducted in English.

Once I had participants who had expressed interest and signed an informed consent form, I scheduled interviews with them which I conducted and recorded on Zoom. A few of the participants asked if they might bring an interpreter with them, in case there was a word or two they did not understand; this proved to be helpful.

In addition to the individual interviews, I also offered an online focus group, also using Zoom web-conferencing technology. The original intention was to conduct three, but in the end the study only had one. The focus group was semi-structured; while supporting participants' own explorations, the main question that l brought to the focus groups was, "Given your experience as a facilitator of these councils, what do you see as their potential contribution to societal transformation? And what would be needed to help realize that potential?"

Of the 11 research participants, all of them were Austrian or German. (More details in the beginning of Chapter 4, and also in Appendix A.) Ten had facilitated two or more Citizens' Councils. The 11th is a public administrator who organized the first citizen council in his state and witnessed the proceedings, yet had not himself facilitated a council. However, he had participated in a facilitator training and in several meetings facilitated in this manner, so he was familiar with the process.

Refining My Methods Through the Pilot Study

The work on facilitation that I report here began with a pilot study, consisting of four initial interviews and one focus group. It was a valuable experience, with both anticipated and unanticipated outcomes. The pilot study provided the opportunity to test my research design and

its utility for harvesting thoughtful and insightful facilitator narratives as well as generating constructive focus group conversation. During their individual interviews, each of the research participants offered a powerful story of a meaningful moment in a council process, from their own perspective. The four pilot study participants had no difficulty recalling such a moment, nor in choosing one from several possibilities. The focus group conversation was equally productive.

During the individual interviews, I began by asking for some demographic information, followed by some initial questions: how they became a facilitator, what they enjoyed most about facilitating these councils, and what they found most challenging. We then proceeded to the main part of the interview, where I invited the facilitator to choose a particular memorable moment from a Citizens' Council – either a particularly challenging moment, or a particularly meaningful one. I asked questions to invite them to expand upon their initial description by contextualizing the incident: what led up to that moment, how they felt as it was occurring, what actions they took, and what the outcome was, from their perspective. After we had thoroughly explored that incident, I asked the facilitator to take a step back from their story, and consider what insights they themselves might draw from that experience – either about the nature of human beings in groups, and/or about the role of the facilitator. In reviewing the material from the pilot interviews, I found that all three parts of the individual interviews – the preliminary questions, the in-depth narratives, and the follow-up question after the narratives – offered valuable insights. Thus, I used the same format for the remainder of the interviews, post-pilot.

Another valuable aspect of the pilot study was that it offered an opportunity to refine some of the logistics of gathering and working with the data. As planned, both the interviews and the focus group were recorded on Zoom. I then used a new software tool, Otter.ai, to create

initial transcriptions, followed by listening to the recordings to correct the errors in the transcription. I then emailed each corrected transcript to the corresponding research participant, for any further corrections or edits with regard to their intended meaning.

Thus far, the outcomes of the pilot study were as expected. The unexpected aspects were that the pilot study surfaced some of the complexities, and attendant choices, of working with the material I had gathered. For example, had I conducted the focus group live, I would have captured the "essence" of each participant contribution on chart paper, where participants could easily verify the accuracy of my distillation of their verbal contributions; afterward, I would have prepared an organized harvest with the text from all of the chart papers. Working virtually, I discovered I could do this retroactively by utilizing the online software tool Mural, which allowed me to create "virtual sticky notes" on the virtual canvas from the transcript. In the process of doing so, I distilled each contribution offered by a participant, as I would have done had I been taking notes real-time in the room, facilitator-style, on chart paper.

As a practitioner working with Dynamic Facilitation, this way of harvesting offers a succinct distillation of each contribution while maintaining participants' original language; it also offers participants the opportunity to verify the accuracy of each item thus harvested in real time. This real-time verification was not possible with my retroactive approach. Still, from a research perspective, the distillation process made visible a clear choice that needs to be made, about the level of analysis I am engaging in as a researcher. In this situation, I am *not* looking at the "um's" and "ah's" and pauses and incomplete starts that are abundantly captured in the recording, as useful as those might be for a different level of analysis; instead, I am looking at units of intended meaning.

In the process of figuring out how to work with the focus group transcript, I realized that I could also utilize Mural for distilling the individual interviews, by "translating" each pilot interview into an extensive series of sticky notes on Mural, and then turning that back into a Word document. This both highlighted, and gave me a way to move forward with, the issue of how much polishing it made sense to do with the transcripts. As I learned in earlier work writing up interviews in the context of journalism, there is a fine balance between allowing enough authenticity so that it sounds like spoken speech, while on the other hand, cleaning up some of the redundancies, hesitations, and filler words that we use in speech that can come across as awkward on the written page. Again, in research, this becomes a decision about on what level do we wish to do our analysis. An additional consideration here is that my research participants were speaking in a second language, and would have easily sounded more articulate had I been able to interview them in German. This is where it was helpful, as I listened to the recording and corrected the errors in the AI transcription, to also be writing down participants' contributions on the Mural sticky notes, as though we were in a facilitated session, where I would be harvesting for meaning -- retaining as many of their own words as possible, while also distilling their contribution into a somewhat more concise form.

In addition to deciding on how to report the participants' contributions, I needed to figure out how to treat my own comments as interviewer and facilitator. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the initial approach in studying mini-publics at one time was to "erase out" all of the facilitator contributions, and focus only on the participants. Thus, I was sensitized to this issue: to what extent did I want to erase out my contributions as a researcher, to allow the focus to be primarily on what participants were saying? Or on the other hand, to what extent did I want to leave my contributions in, to emphasize the co-construction of meaning that was taking place? I ended up

realizing that I needed to do a bit of both, depending on the context. For example, when sending the interview transcripts back to participants for their initial review, I chose to keep my "reflecting back" as part of the edited transcript. However, in the practitioner narratives I have included in Chapter 3, I did some "narrative smoothing" (Kim, 2016, pp. 192-193) by taking out many (not all) of my prompting questions, in order to allow a greater focus on the story the practitioner is telling. In a second round of participant feedback, I sent out only those quotes and narratives that I planned to include in the dissertation; these smoothened narratives were reviewed again by the participants to verify their own intended meaning.

In the focus group transcript, I did *not* include most of the mirroring reflections that I had offered throughout to check for meaning. The exceptions were a few instances where I had clearly not understood the participant's comments, and thus my reflecting back was in the order of a tentative guess that served as a clarifier. However, I did include my own framing statements, as well as occasional questions or comments. Had I been doing the focus group live, this is *not* something that would have been captured on chart paper, because when facilitating, I tend to only chart participants' contributions, and neglect my own. However, for research purposes I determined that including my own contributions as detailed in the recording, offered a more complete depiction of the conversation. I color-coded my statements on Mural, to distinguish them from participant contributions. Afterward, I used Mural to create a text document to send to each participant for their edits and comments, along with a link for viewing the Mural itself. Later, I continued using Mural to create more abstract thematizations of the focus group material.

Working With the Narratives

Once the individual interviews and focus group conversation were transcribed as detailed above, and then verified in a first round by the research participants, I began the

analysis and interpretation. With the responses to the initial question of what facilitators enjoyed the most about their work with the Bürgerräte, and what they found most challenging, it was fairly straightforward to engage in a traditional thematic analysis: exploring the data, sorting it into themes and categories, and looking for patterns. However, when it came to the narratives, my process was somewhat different. Since I had more material than I could use, I began by selecting which stories would both give an overall flavor of the various forms these councils can take and highlight particularly meaningful or distinctive elements. While working on this selection, I mentioned to several colleagues that I felt as if I were creating a quilt of stories: choosing the most relevant parts of the narratives, then framing them with comments and interpretation. Once I had the basic outline of the quilt, a conversation with a mentor helped me see the larger three-fold pattern I had created: the stories I had chosen illuminated aspects of what the facilitators were doing in the room, the outcomes they were helping to create, and how this mini-public format has been growing, developing, and spreading[25]. I then used this three-part framework to organize the implications of my findings for both theory and practice, as detailed in Chapter 5.

Throughout this project, part of my work involved reflection upon the process itself. My own journaling on my questions, my surprises, my challenges, and unexpected discoveries have been a key part of this work. Although I have not reproduced much of that writing here due to space considerations, it has been a significant part of my own meaning-making journey as well as crucial support for my writing process.

Ethical Considerations

[25] Thank you to Margo J. Hittleman for help with this insight.

Participants had the opportunity to review a lightly edited transcript of their individual interviews, shortly after the interview was conducted, so they could amend any of their own contributions. Nearly six months later, participants also had the opportunity to review the selections from their interviews that appear in the next two chapters. With regard to the narratives, they were offered the choice of how they wanted to be acknowledged. All chose to have their real names used instead of a pseudonym.

Participants who took part in the focus group also had the opportunity to review the transcript of that session. Before the session, they were advised that once they participated in the focus group, they would not be able to retract their contributions completely, as those would have influenced the conversation of the group as a whole. They were also advised that any quotes from focus group participants would be used anonymously, following the custom of working with Dynamic Facilitation. In the collaborative product later produced, the only names recorded are for action items.

Validity and Reliability of the Study

From the perspective of Lewis, and Ritchie, et al. (2014), both reliability and validity are key aspects for ensuring various kinds of generalization– whether for generalizing to the larger population from which participants are drawn (representational generalization), generalizing to other settings or contexts (inferential generalization), or for creating useful theoretical constructs (theoretical generalization). These researchers hold that qualitative research can be generalizable, when it is conducted with care. I have intended in this research to create findings that are to some degree useful in all of these dimensions. Regarding inferential generalization, one of my strategies for this has been to be explicit about the context of this study, so that others can better determine what might

be generalizable to their own contexts. Regarding theoretical generalizations, I have taken a similar approach; being as explicit as possible (within time and space constraints) about the various academic fields, theories, and communities of practice that inform my analysis and interpretations, so that others can better determine their usefulness.

Reliability can be understood as the "stability" or "sturdiness" of findings -- the "likely recurrence of key features of the raw data and the integrity with which they have been classified" (Lewis, Ritchie, et al., 2014, p. 356). For example, to what degree would my findings be repeated, if I were to do the same research with a different group of participants who facilitated other Citizens' Councils? While each council is unique in some ways, as are the narratives from that experience, part of stability depends on "whether the data have been consistently and rigorously interpreted" (p. 356).

In turn, validity refers to the "credibility and wider applicability" of a piece of research. Although some qualitative researchers question the usefulness of the term validity and hold that qualitative research should be evaluated by different criteria less linked to the natural sciences, Lewis, Ritchie, et al. prefer to retain the term while modifying "the ways in which validity is operationalized" (p. 357). In this regard, they cite Seale's perspective that measurement validity is best served when qualitative researchers forge "excellent, well-grounded links between the concepts and conclusions they develop, and examples drawn from the data from which these have been derived" (p. 357). To ensure internal validity, data "need to be analyzed in and interpreted in a transparent and credible way" (p. 359). At the same time, the overall quality of the research process involves all aspects of how the research was designed and carried out.

Writing specifically to questions of quality and soundness within action research, Herr and Anderson (2015) recommend maintaining the term validity rather than using alternative terms (p. 67). They distinguish between five kinds of validity: (a) outcome validity (the extent to which useful actions occur as a result of the research, sometimes termed "workability"); (b) democratic validity, also called local validity, relevance, or ecological validity – "the degree to which the constructs and products of the research are relevant to the participating group" (p. 69); (c) catalytic validity, or the extent to which participants and researchers are moved to new understandings and actions; (d) dialogic validity, the extent to which the research is useful to a larger community of practice, including both practitioners and researchers; and (e) process validity, a "sound and appropriate research methodology" – which is both its own category, and also relates to all of the above (p. 67).

Some of the feedback with regard to research quality will eventually come from the participants themselves, after the dissertation is finished and I have had an opportunity to share a summary of the findings with them. To what degree has engaging in this research been useful to them? In my mind, this correlates with what Herr and Anderson (2015) call "democratic validity," but also with outcome validity and catalytic validity. Other feedback will come from the larger community of practice; to what extent will our findings be useful to other facilitators of Citizens' Councils? I see this as relating particularly to outcome validity and to dialogic validity. A third measurement of quality will come from the larger community of researchers and practitioners of deliberative democracy; to what degree will this work offer a thought-provoking perspective that

stimulates their own work? To what extent does it support or trouble other findings in useful ways? I see this as related to dialogic validity and also to process validity.

Recapping the Purpose and Methods of This Study

In sum, the intention of this exploratory research is to give voice to the lived experience of the professionals who facilitate these council processes, and to better understand their work through practitioner narratives. The method has been to offer practitioners an opportunity to reflect on their own practice, both within the individual interviews as well as in a focus-group format. The individual interviews focused on eliciting thick narratives starting with key or pivotal moments in the group process, and then asking for the facilitators' own insights. The focus group explored facilitators' own ideas about ways the work of these councils could be leveraged. In addition, this research explores how Dynamic Facilitation works in the context of social science research for conducting qualitative interviews and facilitating meaning-making in focus groups.

To close this chapter, I will paraphrase something Carolyn M. Hendriks (2007) wrote in the context of a policy analysis project. I have substituted the words in italics, to apply her statement to my own context: "What I sought to do was to ground normative theory in some of the realities of *group facilitation*. To bring the voices of those engaged in this work, into fuller view" (p. 294). Now, to the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

Through 11 individual interviews and one focus group, I gathered a significant amount of information from the participants in this research project, in the form of perspectives, insights, and stories. In this chapter, I begin with some brief paragraphs describing my participants' demographic characteristics, along with their current professional roles, their educational and professional backgrounds, and their varying amounts of experience with the work of facilitating *Bürgerräte*. Then I proceed to share some of the themes that emerged from the initial warm-up questions for the interviews. Next, I include five in-depth narratives of five different council experiences, as told by five different facilitators. One of my explicit intentions is to share parts of these narratives at some length, as well as my own interpretation of them, so that the reader has the sufficient material to develop their own perspective.

Other narratives in this chapter speak to how the *Bürgerräte* have spread and evolved over time; I also include a section on the findings from the focus group I conducted. But first, who are these research participants?

In brief, 11 public participation professionals[26] kindly responded to my call for research participants. You will meet them in a much more personal way in the course of this chapter, but I will begin with some demographic information. These participants were balanced with regard to gender – five women and six men. Their median age was between 45 and 55; three of them were between 35 – 45, five of them were between 45 – 55, and three were between 55 - 65. With regard to professional roles, six were currently working as independent consultants; four as public administrators, most of them in some capacity related to public engagement; and one as an independent sustainability researcher.

[26] As mentioned previously, for the origins of this terminology, see Bherer et al. (2017).

Many of these participants had a high level of experience with regard to these councils. Only four had staffed less than 10 councils; five had staffed between 10 and 20 councils; and two had staffed more than 20 councils. These public participation professionals come from a wide variety of backgrounds; a few were professionally trained in social work, a few others in education, one was a professional mediator, and two had a background in computer science (see Appendix A).

As mentioned earlier, all of the interviews and the focus group were conducted in English. Some of the interviews were conducted with an interpreter present, as a back-up. All of the participants reviewed the initial transcript of their interview, and later on reviewed a second time those portions I had chosen for inclusion in the dissertation.

After having reviewed these materials, each of the research participants chose to be identified by their real name, whenever identification is used. Yet in this first section all of them will remain anonymous, as I would prefer to focus on *what they said*, rather than on *who said what*. This will change later on in this chapter, as I will include names when introducing the practitioner narratives. For now, you will get to know these participants by hearing their responses to the two initial interview questions.

Joys and Challenges of Facilitating Citizens' Councils[27]

After beginning each interview by asking about demographics, and then inviting the participant to briefly describe their journey toward becoming a facilitator, I offered an open-ended warm-up question: *"What do you enjoy the most, about the work you do in facilitating Bürgerräte?"* When posing it, I let each participant know that I'd also be asking them about what they found most challenging, yet I wanted to start with an appreciative stance. In previous

[27] For a summary of the format of these councils, see pp. 21-22; for their impact, see pp. 22-24.

experience as a practitioner, I have worked with strength-based approaches, both in clinical social work and in organizational consulting, where this serves as a useful prelude to addressing challenges and growth areas. Thus, a sincere desire to learn about what's working well informs my stance an academic researcher, and generated enthusiastic and thoughtful responses.[28]

In thematizing participants' responses to this question, I came up with three overarching categories. Over half of the responses clustered around something I'm calling the "joy of witnessing participants' development". Facilitators also mentioned, albeit somewhat less frequently, enjoyable aspects of their own experiences as facilitators, as well as some features they enjoy about the structure and dynamics of the process. These categories appear in a graphic summary at the end of this section.[29] (Please note that in the quotes below, any omitted words are indicated by […]; when it is just "…", that signals a natural pause or trailing off on the part of the speaker. I also use brackets to indicate any words I am adding for clarification purposes.)

Joys of witnessing participants' development. Elements here clustered around two main sub-themes: witnessing growing connection/empathy in the group, and witnessing growing agency/empowerment in individual participants. Also part of this category were some comments that initially surprised me, on the visual transformation that facilitators perceived in participants. This theme was mentioned a few different times; one facilitator responded immediately with

> …how the people change. When they come on Friday, and leave on Saturday afternoon, how different their faces are… ja, this I enjoy most. The way you understand others' thinking, and you don't have to be like, "huh?", it makes you wide and serene… And when M. sees me, he

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[28] Each participant usually offered between one to three responses to this question. Occasionally, participants would mention something they especially enjoy about the *Bürgerräte* at some later point during the interview; those responses have been included here as well.

[29] As with any form of categorization or map, there is an imperfect correspondence with the territory itself, and some responses could be seen as mapping onto all three. However, I chose to group each response into a single category.

> says to me, "Ah, you are on the way with your beauty case!" And this is my moderation bag, with cards and pens. This is my beauty case (laughter).

This facilitator attributed the shift in appearance to a greater sense of relaxation. Another facilitator pointed to the growth of aliveness present with this phenomenon:

> It's always the point where we reach, when you can observe a kind of transformation of the participants. So when they come, they're curious and skeptical. And they're watching out what's going on here, and why am I here. And you can see, as the process goes along, they get more alive... *and you can really see it*. At the beginning, they are sitting in the circle, and watching the others. And it's a different appearance when we start into the second day, for example. It's always absolutely fascinating to me.

It's typical for participants to be curious and skeptical in any new group encounter; and when group dynamics work well, time tends to bring a corresponding growth of relaxation and aliveness; that's not unusual. Yet in addition to the novelty of the humorous remarks about participants' transformed appearance, I want to emphasize what we are seeing with regard to the facilitators: they are supporting the group's development, observing it closely, and rejoicing in it. Paying close attention and appreciating participants are not often mentioned explicitly in descriptions of what facilitators do, yet they are very much in evidence here.

A variation on the "beauty case" motif emphasizes trust, community, and caring:

> There is a joke running within our team, with our facilitators. We have this facilitation suitcase, when we go to the workshops and the councils and so on... and we say this facilitation suitcase is like a beauty case, because it makes people more beautiful. There is a kind of magical development people make through this process, that they build a connection to each other. And there is trust in the room. That's always wonderful to see, in such a short time, a really short time. 12 to 15 people who are randomly selected and don't know each other, transform into a real group and community. And a kind of caring community, because they care about the issue they're talking about… and that's really beautiful.

Another response to the question about "what do you most enjoy?" also echoes the theme of the growth of trust and connection among group members. (*I include my clarifying response as interviewer in italics*):

> What I enjoy the most is the switch when people start to turn from "ego to eco", as we know from Otto Scharmer. When they really start to feel that they are working on something together, and start letting go their ideas of how should things be, really go into a deeper understanding of persons and of personal viewpoints, which they didn't have before. People find friends during sessions like these… this way of connecting people, this is what I enjoy the most. Maybe this is a good explanation. Could you understand it?
>
> *I'd like to reflect back if I may… so there's a point where people start to shift from a smaller focus on only themselves to a larger focus, you described it as "ego to eco". And when you feel that they are starting to work on something together and letting go of their ideas of how things should be, and start working with new ideas they didn't have before... is that close?*
>
> Yes, it's not only the ideas, but it's also they really make personal connections. In this personal connection, they understand there is not an idea I talk to, but there is a person I talk to... and this person has personal insights and personal feelings, and they begin to be empathic. And if this empathy rises, this is actually one of the things I enjoy the most. If you really see that okay, now it's there, now they got it… now they're not struggling or fighting anymore, but they are understanding that they can create something new, in respect and deep understanding for their different viewpoints and ideas.

The theme of personal connections and new friendships showed up a number of times; a different yet related response emphasized the development of a "sense of we":

> What I remember most from my first training with Jim [Rough] was, "the people come as an 'I', and they go as a 'we'." And this is something that *really* happens, in any *Bürgerrat* I have served, any *Bürgerrat* where I have just been an observer, or facilitated. This is what I like (emphasis in the original).

The sense of growing cohesion or solidarity among participants that I have described so far is quite common in mini-publics, and is also a basic feature in the literature on well-facilitated small-group processes in general. So, no surprises up to this point.

Agency / Empowerment. This was the second main cluster within "the joy of witnessing participants' development". Here's one facilitator describing their observation and enjoyment of participants' journey from passive to active:

> Something that I generally enjoy a lot when I do facilitation work, is to observe how people have this process of reflection. So maybe coming from a problem, or coming from a complaint... and when I ask them to go deeper, and when I mirror them, and when I listen to them, and when I repeat what they say, how they get into this reflective state, where they change their role from being passive to being active. Sometimes it feels like they say, "Ah, well, we could actually do this!" And then it's like, "Yeah, wow, there's energy here."

Another facilitator offered a similar theme:

> The participants get quite active, not only by talking when they sit in their half circle, but also later on, when they do their summaries, their statements, present to the public … they get really empowered.

And a third encapsulated this, as a shift from consumers to designers:

> I think it fosters resilience, in a way. So that's also one of those intangibles. Whenever a group of people realizes "we did it ourselves," that's a different thing than when there are experts who come in and tell a community what to do, and basically their problem is taken away from them. It also puts them in a position of consumers; and what the Bürgerrät does, it puts the people in a position of designers.

One facilitator appreciated the hard work in which participants engage:

> To have so often that experience, that those so different people find a way to open themselves, to say very personal things, and to do this *really* hard work to find a common outcome. Which is something so different for every one of us, especially for experts -- it's so different to let some things go and to find a consensus.
>
> And to use this *little* space in their life, where they can make maybe a difference, in the political field of decisions. They don't make decisions in the *Bürgerrat*, we all know that, but they get to influence and help the people who have to make decisions, to make good decisions. Because they are a mixed group, and because they work together in this way, they are a mirror of our society.

Of course, this opportunity for making a difference by influencing decision-makers has some attendant risks. That same facilitator continued:

> It's not a methodology where we ask people for a street survey for one hour, or for sitting together for a three-hour workshop. But we bring them in a room for one and a half days, they work on a summary, they present it on the *BürgerCafé*, they hand it over to the politicians. So that's a lot of work, and effort. And I have had some experiences where people got very, very frustrated because their work was not honored. In that situation, you really get the feeling of what it means, to give your time and your heart and all your intellect and your patience, to sit together with other people, and work on something where you cannot be sure how seriously it will be taken at the end. So just to do that, I think is very powerful.

I will be writing more later about the challenges that facilitators (and participants) experience when there is no strong forum-system link – when participants work very hard, only to feel that their efforts have not been taken seriously. This topic came up frequently as a response to the question about challenges during the interviews, and also surfaced within the focus group. But for now, let's return to the joys of doing this work.

With regard to empowerment, several facilitators focused on the personal aspects of participants' growing sense of agency– *not* just the (potentially uncertain) ability to influence government. This often showed up as a growing sense in participants of having something to offer with regard to conversations about policy:

> One thing I want to mention here, is something I observed in several Wisdom Councils. We have a round in the beginning, where we ask people, "So, what were your first thoughts, when you get the invitation?" or "What was your reaction when you got the invitation?" And I noticed that especially elderly women, sometimes they would say, "Ja, I didn't think it was for me, I wanted to send my husband. Because clearly, he's the one who's like dealing with politics in our family. But then I was told, ja, *you're* invited and it's not my husband, and so I came. But I don't know what I can contribute; I'm here to listen."
>
> So I've heard this in several different ways, how they express themselves. And those are sometimes the people who in the end, are super grateful. And they're like, "I didn't know that I had so many ideas about this topic, I thought it was much too complicated for me, and I'm so happy that we should have more of these spaces."

Another facilitator described participants' growing ability to find meaning in the political dimension of life:

> We often hear, when we do the check-out, they're totally surprised of the creativity of the group, and of the different people sitting here. One of the most [frequent] feedbacks we get, when they come, they say, "I'm not interested in politics." And when they go, they say, "I couldn't imagine that discussing difficult political issues could be so creative and constructive." And that's wonderful! Political education in real life.

Personal agency can also include a growing interpersonal agency, as described below:

> Before, people are being careful, guarded, they don't want to say what they really think. And *after*, they are more interested in how people think. As one told me, when they go shopping now, they not only hear someone's opinion and think, "is it right or wrong"? They want to understand *why* might someone have this opinion, and they ask questions to know why. And this is new. Before, they don't have this experience. And after, they have more.

These interpersonal effects are not just limited to one-to-one interactions with others; some participants continued afterward to interact with one another in small groups:

> For me, the most important is the experience that people, after a *Bürgerrat*, they have contact with deeper layers inside them.... and also, with things happening in the world. In one *Bürgerrat*, two or three days after the *Bürgerrat,* they organized themselves. They are interested in social change and social policies, so after, they organized themselves to continue to meet.
>
> The other day, in Feldkirch, they made an excursion, like a field trip, by themselves…to learn more about field of energy and city planning. They organized events by themselves to get together and go learn more about how local government works, like a learning journey. And this happened, after three different *Bürgerräte*.

At the same time, even empowerment can have a bitter-sweet side. One facilitator who has facilitated many Youth Councils[30] wondered why, given that this process can be so effective, it is not more widely available:

> With these Youth Councils, we get a lot of feedback that the people really enjoyed it, and they really had a great time, and it was so good that they were allowed to speak their mind. […] That's what I experienced with young people, people who don't have these sorts of spaces in society, who live in or work in circumstances where they are mostly told what to do, or how to behave. For them, it's a revelation, this kind of space, where their opinion is valued, and their insights are appreciated.
>
> But I'm thinking, "this is so easy, you know? Why do *we* have to come, and give them this space, where they are allowed to say what they really think?" It's also sad in a way, that there are so few of those spaces, and it's so easy to provide -- just taking them seriously, and encouraging them and trusting them.

Joys of facilitators' <u>own</u> experiences – aspects of being a catalyst. Roughly about one quarter of the responses addressed aspects of the facilitators' *own* experience, in interacting with participants – not just as a witness to participants' development. One facilitator spoke to the initial feelings of anticipation upon entering the unknown:

> It's very special to facilitate for two days, a group of 15 to 20 people whom you didn't know before. You just get names, that's it, maybe the age. They didn't know each other before, most of the time - some maybe, but most of them not. And this moment, when you start, you're coming to this group... If I start, or my colleague who is co-hosting, it doesn't matter, but this starting moment, when you look at each other and see who is here....within a very, very short time, maybe only seconds or a minute, there is a special energy in the room. From the setting, when you sit […] first in a full circle, and you do the checking in, and so on.
>
> And what you feel then, is super complex: it's many things going on, in your head, in your stomach, in your heart, everywhere....so this is what I like a lot, when I do *Bürgerräte*... […] you have your flip charts behind you, the posters, and you get in this different mood, of being here. This is very special, I would say, this is one thing I like a lot.

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[30] Youth Councils, or *JugendRäte*, are an adaptation of the *Bürgerräte* for young people only. I will be saying more about them later on in this chapter.

Another described the experience of maintaining this openness with each participant:

> The form of Dynamic Facilitation makes the room very open, and you have another role as a facilitator, because you have to be like a fascinated child… you are by each person, with the one who speaks, and you are understanding the things they say, and this *tiefe zuhören*, this listening deeply[31], creates a very interesting effect in the person. They are really happy if you understand them well, and if you do it very consistently, then they are empty.[32] If they speak, they are empty […] And then, if they are ready, I go to the others.
>
> This is another way of working with groups. And I like this form, because it opens other possibilities for all of the people in the room, because they have to hear the other person, as long as needed. And this is a new experience for the people that come in, because they don't have this experience in other places. They don't have it because of the time pressure, and people are not really good at listening very deep. And this is a magic moment for me, every time I do it with this attitude, and have this experience.

Clearly, the facilitators who work with this method enjoy this experience of deep listening and communicating back their understanding, until the participant feels complete. This kind of “listening deeply”, an essential aspect of the Dynamic Facilitation process, is known in various mediation traditions as mirroring, offering a reflecting response, or looping. One facilitator identified it as “resonance,” and mentioned how “doing this work is like being at home.” Another facilitator response also speaks to the enjoyment of this kind of listening deeply:

> Well, I enjoy when I can help people think.... when I reflect, and they, from all their heart, they say, "Yeah!" And the look in their eyes, it's just so, "Yeah! this is what I wanted…." I really love that.
>
> *The look in their eyes, when you've reflected, and they're like, "yes!"*
>
> When they realize, "Ah, yeah, *that's* what I wanted to say...” Sometimes it takes them a long time, and they are circulating around something. And then, I have the idea, "it could be this, or that..." and then they are so happy, to realize what they are thinking.

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[31] Rough, 2002, p.83

[32] The term “empty” is often used by Rough in his workshops, and it is the result of “the purge,” which he describes in a section titled “How Dynamic Facilitation Works” (2002, pp. 89-91). The purge is the result of the facilitator’s “listening deeply”; the outcome is that participants feel “empty” in a positive sense.

> *Aha... so you're helping them think. Sometimes it's not so easy, because they're circling around something... and you're saying "Oh, maybe this?" And, yes!*

The purpose of helping each person be fully heard is the group-level creativity that can then emerge. This next quotation speaks to those particular moments in the process:

> …the feeling when people get from that level, from purging, purging, purging,[33] and then you realize, "Ah, now we are having a shift, now we are having a kind of breakthrough…" And it's a learning for me as a facilitator as well, to realize, "Ahh! that's it." Sometimes when maybe you're not so experienced, you cannot really feel it. But when I started feeling, "Ah, wow.... here's something new... here's something happening," it really fills my heart with joy.

In addition to enjoying the process, facilitators also enjoy the outcomes. This does not mean that they are favoring one outcome over another – only that they care that the process has a larger impact. They care about this for the benefit of the participants, as we saw in the last section, but also for themselves, for a sense of their own contribution toward making a difference:

> One thing that is important, which I do enjoy, one of the purposes why I do it, is because I want to also help transform this world. […] So what I enjoy is, if the *Bürgerräte* has an impact on the topic it has worked on, be it on environmental issues, be it on social ones, on land use, whatever. And this you cannot say during this weekend, you can only say afterwards, but I have seen impacts of this participatory method. And this is important for me; I do care about the results.

Appreciating the structure and dynamics of the process. About a quarter of the responses to this question were not about witnessing participants' development, nor about the facilitators' own experience of their catalytic role; instead, they referred to the structure and dynamics of the process. Facilitators mentioned that they enjoyed working with a co-facilitator, learning with and from their facilitation partners; they also mentioned appreciating the length of the mini-public,

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[33] "Purging" here comes from Rough (2002, p.89) and refers to an "emptying-out" of a participant's initial ideas. The person who is purging is being received, heard, and reflected back, in addition to having their thoughts recorded on chart paper (when carried out in person) or on a computerized harvesting document (when carried out on-line.) See also the preceding footnote.

the broad diversity of participants, the appreciative context that creates a climate of openness, and the welcoming of the whole person, including emotions. Here are some quotes:

> For me, the biggest advantage and most enjoyable -- sometimes also not easy -- point of the *Bürgerrat*, is that there are two days, or one and a half days, where ideally people from all different kinds of society come together. Sometimes it's not so easy to bring in a good mix, but just that randomly selected part of society, is something so worthwhile. And it's something which is very special for me, to have the ability to just invite very normal, everyday-life people, and bring them together in a room.

Another facilitator mused on the value of overnights, as well as the appreciative context:

> We have one and half days of time, so it's not so hasty. You don't have such a pressure of time. So, you have more time, and the people, they go home and they sleep one night, and then they come back. And then they have new ideas. So that's something which we usually don't have, that possibility. Usually we have a workshop, three hours, maybe one day, but not this, that the people come back on the next day and come with new ideas.
>
> They come with ideas, they want to talk about the topic, and then they have the possibility, and they have it in a very nice, appreciating context. So they don't have to fear that someone says, "Oh, you're stupid" or "Why do you think so? No, we don't like you..." or something like that. That's not the case in the *Bürgerrat*. They have the possibility to bring in the ideas or the feelings, the whole person.

Others mentioned the climate of authenticity that is created:

> It's really taboo-breaking. You allow yourself, and everybody in the room, to say what you really, really think or feel. Without harming or destroying another person, you can say what you really think, what you fear, what you're happy about... and this is wonderful. Because we need this, we don't need talking around things anymore; we need to come to the point quite quick, in this world.

Careful readers may notice an apparent contradiction in the last two statements: how can you offer a space where you can say what you really think and feel, while at the same time, ensuring an appreciative climate? I hope this will become clearer through the facilitator narratives.

Here are the various responses to the initial question of "What do you most enjoy about facilitating *Bürgerräte*?", in the form of a summary graphic (Fig 1).

Figure 1

Summary of responses to "What do you enjoy the most about facilitating *Bürgerräte*?"

Joy of Witnessing Participants' Development (15)

Connection/Empathy (6)

—Beauty of relaxing into trust & connection (2)
—finding friends (2)
—feeling of "we" (2)

Civic Agency/Empowerment: (9)

—Self as Capable Contributor (5)
  —From passive to active
  —From consumer to designer
—Interpersonal Agency (2)
  —From guarded to curious
—Small Group Agency (1)
—Politics as Potentially Creative and Constructive (1)

Joy of Serving as a Catalyst (6)

-Being present with the unknown (1)
-Deep listening, resonating, reflecting back (2)
-Hearing the unsaid (1)
-Recognizing shifts (1)

—Celebrating meaningful outcomes (1)

Appreciating Structure & Dynamics of Process (6)

—Allowing time - value of overnight (2)
—Value of microcosm (1)

—Appreciative Context (1)
—Authentic Context (1)

—Welcoming the Unexpected (1)

The next question participants addressed was, *"What do you find most challenging about facilitating Bürgerräte?"* Here, too, I have grouped their responses into themes.

"Holding back" for participants' benefit. Even if we are not professional facilitators, many of us might relate to the challenge of having to hold back our own knowledge or perspective on things in certain situations, when we know there is a good reason for doing so:

> Sometimes it's a bit painful, because I'm also thinking a lot about change, change of the system, sustainability, all these things. And sometimes it's a bit painful, to hold back all this information that I have. Like people are thinking, "Ah, how could we make transport more sustainable? Ah, I don't know if there's any way..." and I know of 10 examples where cities have tried new innovative things, but I'm really trying not to influence them in any way. Because it should be their idea, they should come up with it. And sometimes it's a bit painful to see them running in circles and then end up at a solution where I'm thinking, "Yeah, there are much better ways than that already." But I think it's important for a facilitator to be neutral and not to influence.

The importance of a facilitator not inserting their own ideas and perspectives into the process is a well-established foundation in most facilitation traditions. Yet the situation can be even more challenging when a person in the role of facilitator is holding back in the face of extreme views:

> Recently there was a situation where we were talking about vaccinating […] we've got the Q Anon and also the QuerDenker, people with strange theories about Corona. And all of a sudden someone started with arguments, where I thought it's going that way. And I got really, really nervous. That was challenging, because I realized, "Oh, I'm a bit scared now, if I can still be the facilitator."
>
> As a facilitator, I really try not to get in conflict with my own ideas about the world, and to suspend my own ideas. So, when something comes up, that is *really* contrary to what I usually think, it's harder to keep the space and to stay with the person. And it was very interesting, because I was really nervous, and I was sweating. And I could feel in my body, that I'm really nervous. But afterwards, others told me they did not realize it at all, and they did not see me getting nervous. And so, there was a big difference between what I felt I'm

> going through, and what people saw in me. So that was also interesting, because I would not have thought that people do not see it.[34]

When dealing with extreme views, facilitators are not just managing their own internal reactions; there is also the challenge of managing the response of other participants, as we will see in the next excerpt. Here I highlight the relational nature of the interviewing process by including some of my reflecting back to the participant what I've understood as an interviewer (*the comments in italics*) as well as some of the comments from the back-up translator (***in bold italics***):

> For me the most challenging is, when someone says opinion that is different from mine. To hear all, and to "all is okay." All opinions are okay, and not judge them. I really need much meditation before, so that I feel really empty […] Because I feel that the people, they feel if I can really take their opinion, or they feel when I think "oh...." And this is the most challenging, really to be like empty pot, and take all to me. Sometimes I must sit on my tongue and say, "Ooooh…"
>
> *Yeah, thank you so much for being open about this challenge. I'm hearing you say a few different things here; one is that, um... you know, it's hard! And sometimes, we have to sit on our tongue... You think there is a level at which people can sense or feel if we are not fully taking them in. And you want to do right by them, by being as empty as possible, so that you CAN fully take them in. So, it's not just, that you are not saying something...?*
>
> No, it's much deeper. Yes, at the beginning [of doing this work] I thought, "Okay, when I have poker face, it's okay." But there are many, many layers under this. Like [the poet] Rumi said, "we meet in the field where [there] is nothing right, nothing wrong."
>
> I think this is a really important way to be a good facilitator, and maybe I can give you a *beispiel*... an example of that. It was the *Bürgerrat* for *Bildung*, education, the future of education. And one man said to me, "It's good to be strong with the children and also to hit them, when they not do what we want." And when people say something that is not to conform with the others, I can feel that they think, that I have to say something. I don't agree [with the statement] when I feel it, but I want to be with this man or woman, and want to

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[34] By "others" and "people," I am assuming this facilitator meant her professional colleagues, with whom she was facilitating and with whom she debriefed afterward. But this is just one example of a place where I would like to go back and clarify further, what a research participant meant.

understand what he or she means. I'm sure there are situations that participants of Bürgerrate think I have to say more, or I have to say, "that's not right."

Yeah, so let me see if I'm understanding here… you're thinking about a particular example, a Bürgerrat that was focused on the future of education. And when a man said something about needing to be strict, including hitting children when children are misbehaving, you could feel inside yourself that you don't agree. And at the same time, you could also feel the desire to be curious and to want to understand more...?

What I understood is that she senses that the other people, the participants, expect of her to react to that man […] she senses that people want her to say, "being strict and hitting kids is wrong." The people expect her to react to that, because it's wrong.

Ja, because then others, they say "No, that's not right." And they go to different opinion. And I say, "Moment, moment", and I ask the man, "Why do you think this?"

So you can sense that people are expecting you to censure or to give an opinion. And they themselves are reacting by wanting to come in and contradict […] And so you stepped in, and you said "Okay, hold on a minute, I hear that you have a different perspective. And I want to ask this man a few more questions. I want to understand more."

In this third, more complex excerpt, we see three related challenges: (a) listening deeply to someone who is expressing an extreme view; (b) actively restraining other participants from jumping in; and (c) tolerating the frustration of the other participants. Although this third example is more complex than the first two, all three can be seen as part of the first category that I call "in-the-room" challenges. I also created two smaller clusters of challenges: "working with decision-makers" and "structural challenges"; all three will be shown in a graphic summary at the end of this section.

Now back to the in-the-room challenges. While working with this set of responses, I realized that many of the in-the-room challenges that surfaced in the interviews, could be seen as different facets of "holding back". This includes holding back one's own views, as well as

holding back with regard to responding to participants' emotions, including their impatience and their frustration. Here is another nuanced example of this same theme:

> it's very important to be very consequent [consistent?] in this form of moderation, I think, because [as you are engaging in deep listening with one person] the other people have to wait. And there are many *emotionen*, emotions, if they have to wait. And they have to go to through crises, they have not all good emotions, because they have to wait... and in the brain, there are many things that come together, but they have to wait.
>
> And I think this is one of the secrets of the *methode*, method, because they have to go through the through these emotions. And if they all go through the emotions, it will be good for all, because the emotions are a way to understand. You can *feel* it in the room, after the DF, they are connected.
>
> *So you were saying, it very important to be very consequent. Because when people have to wait, that brings up a lot of their emotions, and they're not all good. But going through this emotional aspect ends up being good for everyone, for the group, because it brings people closer together in the end…?*
>
> ***While listening deeply to other people, they go through their own emotions. While doing that, they work through them and are more connected to themselves and also to others.***
>
> The challenge is the *irritation* of the group… you come into the group, and then you make the check-in, and there are many questions from the people, how it works, this method. And then you begin with one [person], you say the question, and then you write all the things [they say] on the flip chart. And the irritation of the people is also in the room. And the challenge is, that you as a facilitator, *left die verarwortung bei the people, du last die verantwortung bei den menschen, du haltest das aus.* You stay strong.
>
> ***The challenge is that you as a facilitator leave the responsibility in dealing with these irritations in the hands of the person having them. You resist the temptation of resolving it. You stay strong.***
>
> You don't make intervention that you say, how it works, and you don't explain many times the method, and you don't explain the purpose, why you do this on this way. The first challenge is *aufzuhalten*, to stay in the role, and you don't make intervention.
>
> ***The first challenge is to resist resolving the tensions in the room.***

These words point to why I consider this interaction another kind of holding back. It's not just holding back subject matter information, or one's own values, beliefs, and judgment. There is also a holding back from attempting to fix participants' emotions, and instead, being able to be present with them. The kind of presence that it takes to "stay strong" in the face of participants' different emotions was described by another highly experienced facilitator as follows:

> I would say, to have a good result of a *Bürgerrat*, you have to be able to get out of your comfort zone. Human beings are often irrational. They are also emotional. As facilitator, you're really asked to handle this mixture of rationality, irrationality, emotionality, fight and harmony. There's so much going on, at the same time. This is possible, but difficult: it depends so much how you feel that day, how you get into this process.
>
> Are you anxious? Are you tired? Are you curious? Or not? It's very, very important to be strong at that moment, to be very present at that moment... therefore [DF] is the most difficult facilitation methodology. But you get out really a lot, when it works out well.

Less frequently mentioned in-the-room challenges: In addition to the most frequent in-the-room theme of various forms of holding back, a few other themes emerged with lesser frequency. The importance of helping participants shift from seeing themselves as representatives to speaking more authentically was mentioned briefly in two interviews. Two also described the particular challenges involved in combining the roles of facilitator and scribe.[35] One facilitator mentioned the initial deflation participants experience when they learn that a much larger pool of randomly-chosen participants had been sent the original invitation, and the people in the room were the only ones who had responded. Another facilitator mentioned the challenge he experienced whenever, after the main creative phase of the process, participants toned down their recommendations in preparation for the reporting out stage.

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[35] This is a characteristic feature of the facilitator's role in Dynamic Facilitation, although sometimes the choice is made to separate the two functions.

Structural Challenges. While some councils end up with a deeply significant emotional experience, others stay on a more surface level. While some might see this as a relief, this can also be experienced as a challenge. Here is one facilitator's response:

> Sometimes you realize that [the process] stays on a shallow level, it doesn't want to go deeper. That can be a bit frustrating, when you're in this special state of mind [letting go of judgment] but still, you don't want to interfere and *lead* into that [deeper state]. But afterwards, you have a feeling that so much more could have been possible, so that's sometimes a bit frustrating. But you go with the energy of the group....
>
> *Sometimes it can feel a little disappointing afterwards, if you feel that the group didn't really go as deep as they could, or as far as they could. And as a facilitator, you don't want to lead them or interfere, you want to follow their energy, but when their energy doesn't go very deep, that can be frustrating, because you know what's possible…?*
>
> Yeah. And I think it also has to do with the issues that were chosen. If they are shallow issues, like simple design questions or something, superficial things, then they most of the time, don't have a lot of energy *in* them, no conflict, no complexity... then it's... yeah.
>
> *If it's a shallow issue with little complexity, then it's not as satisfying as when you are able to go more deeply with the group…?*

Although the caliber of the question that a council is exploring may end up affecting what happens in the room, I have grouped this response as one of the structural challenges, since usually the nature of the question has been decided *before* participants arrive in the room. In a different interview, another facilitator commented on how the theme of the council can affect potential participants' willingness to engage in the council:

> So, do we really have a *good* one, a "dragon problem"? Or is it a question which is not really a "dragon problem" -- and then we have the problem that the people don't really want to come, because it's not so interesting.

Two other challenges I categorized as structural were the difficulty posed for some potential participants by the length of the council format, especially for youth and elders; as well

as the challenge of coping with language differences. Although these issues surfaced in only one of the interviews, they are areas of concern, as they have to do with accessibility:

> Sometimes it was problematic that it's so concentrated on language, you have to speak, you have to explain, you have to talk. And then we have some people who couldn't speak so good German. And then they spoke English. And then we translated it a little bit. But we had also people, for example, one was from Hungary or from Czech, so that was a little bit difficult.
>
> And for some people, it's really difficult to sit and to listen so long, even if there is only 12 people, but they have to listen a lot. And they are not used to this [...] they are not used to sit all the time and to listen. Sometimes it's also [challenging] for young people, they don't have so much time, they don't really want to stay for one and a half day. They usually come in for some hours, and then they are leaving again.
>
> And elderly people, sometimes they have problems with their health. So, they can't come on the second day, because they don't feel too well. Or, they don't want to come alone. They want to come with their husband or with a friend. Then they call us, and ask us if they can come with somebody together. And that's possible, we allow that.

Lastly, another challenge I categorized as structural is the concern expressed by another facilitator about losing much of the valuable information generated during the course of the council at the point when the outcomes are distilled down to a handful of recommendations. These challenges are worth exploring further in another study.

Dealing with Decision-Makers. A third category of challenges, "dealing with decision-makers," came up several times in the interviews. Participants spoke about these challenges at length. Because this was also one of the main themes that emerged during the focus group, I will take up this topic later on, when discussing the results of the focus group.

More on "holding back to hold space". Back to the most common challenge mentioned by facilitators -- the in-the-room challenge of holding back. The restraint and personal discipline involved in this can be seen as the flip side of "holding space" for others. Here is what one facilitator had to say about the challenge of holding space:

> [one of] the challenges during a *Bürgerrat*, is of course that the situation can flip, that one topic is brought up, and in a second, everything changes in the room. The mood, the way that people talk to each other, there can be aggression, there can be sadness, whatever, and this is challenging, this is when you really have to *hold the space*. This is what we're planting, and still, it's challenging when it happens. (emphasis added)

In the first case study, we will be looking at the in-depth narrative this facilitator offered, as an example of that kind of sudden shift where "everything changes in the room".

Now, to close this section on challenges, I will return to the example we saw earlier, of the challenges involved in holding space for an extreme or unpopular view – in this particular case, the man who did not believe in sparing the rod. I had paused the narrative earlier here:

> I'm sure there are situations that participants of a *Bürgerräte* think I have to say more, or I have to say, "That's not right." […] because then others, they say "No, that's not right." And they go to different opinion. And I say, "Moment, moment", and I ask the man, "Why do you think this?"

Here is the rest of the story:

> […] and the day after, the next day, this man, he told us a story: how he, when he was young, and his father hit him and he cried. This was really... a healing time of *Bürgerrat*.
>
> *And then the following day, this man shared this very moving experience of having been hit by his father, and he had tears as he was sharing this story. And you felt it was a very healing opportunity for him to share the story… And how do you think that experience in the Bürgerrat, affected the outcome of that Bürgerrat?*
>
> I think this is, for the participants, a deep learning. Because they experience that, and not only hear that. When I want to explain […] in words that it's important we hear all opinions, it's not so deep. In comparison, when I just do it, and I know and I trust in the process, I know that they will understand the next day, not now. And it's not a need for me to explain, or make the magic moments go away, because [of] too many words.
>
> *Yeah. So in the moment, you didn't explain why you were doing this…?*
>
> It's like, laugh, laugh also work like this. [These were the words I originally heard.] Many always speak about it. It's boring.

You just DID IT. Trusting that participants will come to understand eventually, by experiencing the process, the value of listening to all perspectives. And I didn't quite understand that thing that you said at the end about laugh? Laughter…

Not laugh! Love, love, *liebe*. Love…

.

Oh, LOVE! Oh, so you don't want to TALK about love, you just want people to experience it?

Yes.

I think she was saying that you can't explain how important it is, to be heard. People have to experience it, just like love... If people experience it, they know what it is; you can't talk about it.

These reflections underscore that what a facilitator *does not* do -- or what they do internally, in holding back, that is not visible externally – may be as important as what they do that *is* visible. Although it is generally understood that a facilitator does not offer their own perspective on the topic, the other ways in which facilitators hold back, as well as their understanding of how and why they do so, has not been explored much, at least in the deliberative democracy literature.

The following graphic (Fig. 2) summarizes the various challenges mentioned by the facilitators:

Figure 2

Summary of Responses to "What do you find most challenging about facilitating *Bürgerräte*?"

"In the room" challenges (15)

"Holding back / holding space" (9)

…facilitators' own ideas and perspectives (1)

…facilitators' own beliefs, in response to extreme or unpopular views (2)

…In face of participant's impatience or frustration (3)

…from attempting to resolve the tension in the room (1)

…and holding space for strong emotions (2)

Other ITRC, misc. (6)

Technical challenges of combining listener and scribe role (2)

Facilitating shift from "representative" to authentic participant (2)

Dealing with participants' initial deflation (1)

Responding to participants' "toning down" recommendations (1)

Structural challenges (6)

Challenge of not losing important info in condensing outcome to a handful of recommendations (1)

Difficulties posed by multiple languages (1)

Central questions that don't require much depth, or attract potential participants (2)

Difficulties posed by length of format, especially for youth or elders (1)

Difficulties posed by having a talk-based method (1)

Challenges in "dealing with decision-makers" (5)

To be explored in later section, along with outcomes of focus group

The Context for the Narratives

During the interviews, I learned that there are now different contexts where *Bürgerräte* take place, as well as different kinds of *Bürgerräte*. First, in addition to the original consultative model (where a council is commissioned by a local government entity to offer input on a particular policy issue, much as a citizen's jury or a planning cell might be used) these councils are now often used as a kick-off for a Local Agenda 21 project, a longer-term community sustainability project that is government-funded. Second, the *Jugendrat* are councils comprised of only young people, and for only one day, in contrast to the usual 2 days for the adult *Bürgerrat*. The next three stories give examples of each.

First *Bürgerrat* Narrative: "Everything was turned upside down"

This first narrative is about an early *Bürgerrat*, one that followed the original consultative model. It exemplifies one of the challenges mentioned earlier in response to the warm-up question about joys and challenges: "One topic is brought up […] and in a second, everything changes in the room." The facilitator in this interview is Ines Omann. By way of introduction, here is her response to the question of how she arrived at this work:

> I did my PhD in ecological economics, which is already an interdisciplinary theory, not only a theory but also a research forum, where the economic system is seen as part of a bigger one, the biosphere if you will, and the biosphere is the dominant partner, not the economics. The economics is here to serve us humans, for living a good life. So this is when it all started, that I got interested more and more in […] what is the good life? What is needed for it? And started to work in transdisciplinary research projects, so always interdisciplinary plus stakeholder engagement -- be it citizens, politicians, NGOs, civil society groups, and so on.
>
> And I realized when I do work with people, I have a bit of a gift, because I'm quite open and it's easy for me to talk to different people with different backgrounds. However, it's important that you have also the skills and tools, not only the skills but the tools for it, so I started [attending] different moderation trainings. My home base, I would say, is Art of Hosting[36]. It

[36] This is another facilitation methodology that is a key part of the participatory ecosystem that has evolved in Vorarlberg: more on this in a later section.

> is also something the Vorarlberg gang brought to Austria. Sooner or later, I came across Dynamic Facilitation, and got the training about 11 years ago, in Vorarlberg. Since then, I facilitated about 10 *Bürgerräte* a la Vorarlberg, but use DF also in my work within research, especially when there are emotional, wicked, complex situations and problems.

After Ines had responded to the initial warm-up question about the joys and challenges of facilitating *Bürgerräte*, she shared this story about a particularly memorable moment:

> Maybe one of my strongest moments I had […] was in a rural area in Austria, a valley. And in this valley, there are several communities and they together are in an association of these communities. And the mayors decided to have a *Bürgerrat* on the topic of how they want to evolve in the future, because it's in a very touristic area. And pretty much all these typical Austrian stereotypes you can think of, are there. And they wanted to get out a bit, of this beer, nature, touristic Dirndl and Lederhosen thing. And the question was, "What is our vision for this valley, or for this area, in about five or 10 years? How do we want to come there? […] The first day [was] easy, it was all you can imagine […] about how to increase the quality of life so that people do not move away, and so on.
>
> And then, in the very end… it was the last DF session of the whole *Bürgerrat* on Saturday, just before you summarize and come to your harvesting. One of the young ones, I think he was about 18, said, "Stop, stop, stop. This is all a way to meet, and we are talking all around the elephant in the room. And this is, you have the biggest drug problem in Austria, in our little nice valley. So drug addiction, heroin and stuff. After Vienna, the highest rate." And we were all like, "Puh!"
>
> I was facilitating that moment. First there was silence, and then.... everybody started to talk and be quite aggressive to this young man and say, "No, no, no, that's not true. We don't have a problem. You're lying." After a while, Christian and I, the two of us who were facilitating, said, "Okay, calm down. We ask one after the other, about your concerns."
>
> And after a while, it was clear that this was true, what the young man said. People were starting to cry, especially two older women, I remember... this is long ago, in 2012 or so, that I did it. And it was this magic moment, where everything was turned upside down. And what was said before was still true, but not so relevant anymore.
>
> And we decided together, to go a bit longer than was planned, and they were thinking about solutions to this problem. And they found quite so many solutions. Mainly going away from accusing the parents that they didn't educate their kids, that they are drug addicts, to saying "Okay, but we might maybe help them. They need support." And it's not only that they take drugs there, but it's also some drug trading going on, and so on. So that they came from

> accusing everybody, to thinking about, "What might be the reason for it? And how can we not make a symptom cure, but really go to the sources of the problem?" And then really great ideas came up. And then they ended this *Bürgerrat*.
>
> And then the mayors were so keen afterwards, they came in on the same day and said, "How was it? How was it?" And Christian and I said, "Well, the result was maybe unexpected for you." And he [Christian] said it then already, so they [the mayors] could prepare a bit for the before the public presentation. And I have to say they reacted quite, quite well. Because they were also silent, but they knew it, of course.
>
> And somehow there was a relief, this taboo-breaking young man who said, "Look at this, we have this big problem." And the relief that it came up finally, eventually, so that they see their citizens behind them, that they can start doing something, the politicians, against this problem. And indeed, they started some drug centers, information centers, stopping accusing the families, [started] integrating them again. […]
>
> And yes, it was tough! I was so happy to have Christian, a very, very experienced facilitator there, and we could hold this space.

So, the shock of dealing with a very unexpected situation; right toward the very end of a process, the elephant in the room emerges, and turns everything upside down. Participants react with anger initially, wanting to deny the truth of the situation. After reflecting back the gist of this powerful story, I asked this facilitator for some additional details, about how she and her partner had responded, when all of these angry people were speaking at the same time:

> It's a while ago.... first of all, it was mainly the older people, who were saying something. Younger ones were rather silent. You saw their faces how concerned they were, and shocked somehow, but they knew about it. What did I do? I think I was looking at Christian […] We reminded them of our communication rules, and asked them to really speak one after the other, and we promised we would hear you, although it's very late; there will be time to talk about it […] Appreciation [for] everything that is said, there is no right or wrong. This is his opinion, you might have another one, we will hear them. But it's important to hear it.
>
> And […] maybe we did even a little break, I'm not sure. Maybe said, open the windows, get a bit of fresh air, and in a moment you come back. […] And then we use maybe this break, Christian and I, to talk… but [then] we went on, as DF says we should go on, and this

> worked. And he [the participant who spoke out] had time to really concretize what he means, he gave examples […] and then he came up with more details, the room got more and more silent, and there was… *Zustimmung*… agreement or approval of what he said. This again, was a magic moment. Because it got from this chaos, to this, "Okay, now it's out." […] It is said, we have it here, it's not the "hidden something" anymore. And we can work with it. And from that moment on, we could go again into this DF mood. They built it up from there, as we did with other topics.

So we can be following a method and then, something unexpected happens. We step out beyond the framework, to a place where our ability to be present with what is emerging is what matters most. And then, eventually, something settles, and we can "go again into this DF mood", of coming up with creative solutions to the problem that we are now facing together. As it seemed that extending the time for the session had been a crucial decision to allow this to happen, I asked Ines to say a bit more, about how she and her facilitation partner had let the group know that they wanted to "go a bit longer than was planned":

> I think we said that we would […] do it until it's really over, until everybody said, "It's okay now, I've said what is needed to say." And it did not take very much longer, but I think it was supporting that we said, "We do not stop here, although the time is maybe over, for the break and then the harvesting. But we will go as long as we need, here." I remember nobody stood up or went out, they all stayed, and it did not take that long.

We see here the paradox of the facilitators recognizing the importance of the moment, saying we are going to stay here as long as we need to, and yet once the space is created to explore the issue, a lot of productive work can happen quickly, and "it did not take that long." As Ines mentioned earlier, there was a shift from initially blaming the parents involved, to figuring out how to support them. I later asked about the BürgerCafé, the larger public meeting, and how the public there had responded to the work of the council:

> The citizens were calm, and as if they had expected it somehow, I don't know. But "Yeah, yeah, we know it. And let's see what we can do." I think they supported the results and the ideas and solutions that came. The drug part was maybe one quarter of it. I remember we had maybe three, four clusters where we presented the topic and concerns and solutions. […] The

> other parts were there more, because we talked about them one and a half days, and maybe one hour on this […] and this was good, because the Valley is not only the drug problem, as it is not only the touristic area.

At the public *BürgerCafés*, the participants of *Bürgerräte* typically present not just the problems and challenges they have identified, but also the solution ideas and recommendations that they have generated and explored in response. Having had the opportunity to work through some of the emotional charge around the elephants in the room, the council's presentation to the larger community afterward could be more balanced ("the Valley is not only the drug problem, as it is not only the touristic area") and more forward-looking.

During this interview, Ines mentioned that the following year, this same region held a Youth Council. Participants were from 14 or 16 to 25 years old, and it was initially difficult to recruit them, but in the end the effort was successful:

> The mayors wanted to know, what they can do, that these young people -- after doing their studies or experience in a city or outside -- come back and live in this area and develop it further. What do they need, in order to feel well here and to want to live here also in the future? Even [with] the situation as it is, still super touristic, where the young people did not identify [with that] so much anymore.
>
> After checking in, we shared then the results of the other assembly, the *Bürgerrat* that was happening the year before. […] One of the mayors was there […] to say hello. He said what has been done after the first *Bürgerrat*: it was not only the drug topic, there were also some other topics, like climate. And so they could see, these young people, that the politicians, the mayors, take the *Bürgerrat s*eriously. This helped them, because they were *very* skeptical on policy, young people in Austria. I remember it was in a climbing hall. This was wonderful! We had a climbing hall there, with the young people, so the whole environment was great.

The organizers were able to convey the seriousness of the engagement effort by choosing an attractive location for the young people, and also, by having one of the mayors come personally to share an update about the results from the previous year's council. Both of these councils, while particularly memorable in some ways, are also typical of the *Büro für Zukunftsfragen's*

early explorations with the *Bürgerrat*, where they often worked with communities in the rural areas of Vorarlberg, before scaling up to the state-wide councils that they now coordinate on a yearly basis.

Second *Bürgerrat* Narrative: "Everybody has it in their own hands"

The context for this next narrative is the launch of a 1.5 year community sustainability project in Upper Austria. Florian Sturm started out organizing *Jugendräte* and now also facilitates *Bürgerräte*[37]:

> What I am going to describe here is the most recent Wisdom Council[38] that I facilitated. It was last year, I think it must have been in September. It's the first one I did with my new work colleague. And it was one which was during Corona. It was not lockdown, but it was special circumstances, like there was this thing with the distance between people, they had to hold a distance of one and a half meters. There were restrictions in place where you couldn't just switch places, you had your assigned seat. And every time you get up, you had to put on your mask again. And as I said, one and a half meters distance between people.
>
> And also it was unusual, because we actually wanted to have 15 to 20 people, but the mayor overruled us. So we had 27 or 28 people in the end. At first, we thought, "Okay, this is going to be hard." But it turned out really good, actually. We had a meeting before, and also several conversations with the mayor. And then in September, we did a Wisdom Council.
>
> First of all, it was pretty interesting because they were super self-critical. They were talking about how it's so important to change your behavior, to influence the climate crisis, and how they would sometimes not manage themselves, to change their behaviors. And one memorable incident was when, in the afternoon of the second day, one guy was reflecting on how, in the climate context, some people would buy a photovoltaic solar panel to put on your roof... and some people would buy a new car for the same money. And so an important

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[37] Later on in this chapter, when we take a closer look at Youth Councils, we will be hearing more about Florian's professional journey, as it is quite intertwined with the development of the Youth Councils.

[38] Many practitioners in Austria still call the Vorarlberg *Bürgerräte*, "Wisdom Councils" when they are speaking in English, as this was the original name of Jim Rough's model from which the *Bürgerräte* are derived. For a closer look at the commonalities and differences between the two, see Zubizarreta et al. (2020). As mentioned earlier, since the publication of the 2020 OECD report, I have chosen to use the term "Citizens' Councils", as that is what they call the *Bürgerräte* in that report. Before then, I often used the term "Civic Councils", both as a way to emphasize that Jim Rough's original model has been adapted in some significant ways in the Austrian context, and also to reflect more accurately the meaning of the German-language term *Bürgerrat.*

question would be, "what does your grandchild profit more from?" And that was a pretty deep moment... it felt like it made a change in the atmosphere of the room.

In response to what led up to this moment, Florian offered additional details:

In the first day, the topic started out with a lot about traffic and about people having requests, like there should be a speed limit there, and big trucks, they go so fast here... there should be a walkway there, it's really unsafe, and stuff like that. It was more about their seeing the whole thing from their own situations. They live there, and so the need is there. And that was also an interesting moment, when they started to say, "Yeah, it's kind of weird that we're always saying that people should follow the speed limits. But when you're yourself in the car, it's also hard and you also drive [faster] than you're allowed to." So that was kind of reflective moment. That was pretty nice.

So different topics were brought up. And then the second day in the morning, we invited the mayor to answer some of the requests. And so in the morning of the second day, the mayor was there. And he got into this situation where there were a lot of requests, which he couldn't [fulfill]. He said, “This is not in our responsibility, this the state has to deal with it, we can't just regulate the streets in our municipality, we have to bring this up, but then we have to go a different authority.” For several topics, it was like this.

And then the response [from participants] was a bit frustrated. The same guy who said that thing afterwards, [“what would your grandchild benefit the most from?”] earlier he said, “Yeah, so why are we sitting here, anyway? If everything we bring up, is not possible.” It was a bit of this frustrating moment, like maybe this “groan zone” or something. And then the mayor left, and still we continued. Everybody was there on the second day who was there on the first day, we didn't lose anyone.

And they talked about different things, and for me this shift, or this [particular] question, represented this way of [moving on] from asking, “What can the municipality do, and what can the mayor do?” And obviously, there's not so much they can do, because there are other authorities. It's more like “Okay, so everybody has it in their own hands, if they buy a car or a solar panel. So the question you should ask yourself is, ‘What does your grandson or the following generations profit from?’ […] We don't have to complain all the time that the mayor doesn't do enough for us.”

So how did the facilitators respond to this statement from this participant?

At that moment, my colleague was facilitating; I was the observer. He repeated it, and he was very much focusing on this sentence. He really tried to get everybody to listen to this once again, and to make sure that everybody understood, what he [the participant] had said. When

> we're observing, we're doing this storyline on the flip charts. And so I also wrote that down, so that it doesn't get lost. We also mentioned it several times afterwards, as a kind of metaphor for several things that came up afterwards.
>
> *And what happened during the remainder of the council?*
>
> Because it was Corona, and we had these restrictions, we would go back and forth from the half circle, and then we would go to smaller groups, where they would always be in the same small groups. With 28 people, it's really hard to have everybody talking. So in the small groups, they would have the chance to bring up the topics that have not been mentioned yet. It was quite late in the afternoon, so a little bit after that, we would go into the small groups to gather other solutions, or the ideas that have been lost, and then sum up the whole thing in their small groups. I liked the whole process, because they were, as always, a really diverse group. And it really felt like, in the end of the second day, that they were really on the same page. They had similar topics.

As he shared the story, Florian recalled more details about the participant who on the second day, had asked the evocative question that Florian saw as catalyzing the group shift from asking only what the mayor could do, to also looking at what they themselves could do:

> And another thing that one guy said, actually in the end of the first day, that was already nice. [At first] he was complaining a lot, making these sarcastic or even cynical remarks. He had obviously had some bad experiences with the mayor or people in the *Gemeinderat*, the [council of] elected representatives. He said, "Yeah, I have given up on this, and this is not gonna lead anywhere." And [then] in the end of the first day, he said, "Thanks for inviting me. And now I'm having hope again". Something like this, that was pretty nice, and he was still there [on the second day]. [And he was the one who] expressed this feeling of, "oh wow, we can really make a change. It's up to *us*."

I asked about the outcomes, and whether they had included things that people themselves could do, as well as what they wanted the city government to do. In response, Florian offered additional details that illustrated more about the kind of shift that had taken place:

> Yeah, definitely. It was definitely the feeling that on the one hand, of course, there are some things that we have to delegate. And it was also a pretty nice moment when in the end of the second day, one woman mentioned that actually, we shouldn't be so hard on the mayor, he's trying his best. She said, "We want to appreciate what the mayor does already," and something [about] going away from this confrontative "We are entitled to political

> representation who fights for us" and this separation of "We are just the citizens, you should be the one going more into this", to "Okay, we're equal partners, and you're doing your part and you're trying to do what you can do, and it's not all going to work... *and*, we can do it."
>
> And that also was reflected in the outcomes, especially concerning traffic recommendations, where they said, "Yeah, we want you to be a bit more persistent, and please try to make this happen". And on the other hand, it was also like, "Okay, there are these possibilities to shop locally already, we have this one shop where they have the products of the local farmers and regional farmers, so we can shop there, everybody can shop there. Maybe you can make more publicity for that, so that people know, but it's also in our responsibility to go there and to do this. And there are the local restaurants and pubs and they are such important places to meet and to socialize. And still, they are struggling, especially in this Corona time. So, it's also our responsibility to support them and to go there."
>
> I mean, right now, everything's closed because of Corona. But then the mood was, we should go out more, we should support them by going there. So, it was definitely that they went away from this feeling of entitlement and feeling of "Something should be done for us" to a more empowered mode of, "There's so many things we can do".

One of the outcomes of this particular council, in addition to their recommendations for the local politicians and public administrators, was that seven or eight people volunteered to participate in the ongoing core team for the longer-term sustainability project that this council was launching:

> Usually for this whole one-and-a-half-year process, there's a core group of people who are steering the whole process. And they consist of also politicians, but mostly people from civil society or engaged citizens. And at the end [of the Bürgerrat] we also asked if some of them want to become part of this steering group, of this core group. And seven or eight people said, "Ja, I really want to be part of this core group".
>
> I mean, it's like one meeting per month in the evening. And so it's not nothing. One strength of the Bürgerrat is obviously that it's a one-time thing, so people don't have to commit themselves for longer. But in the end, they do; I mean, some of them do.

As we will see in greater depth further on, this is one reason why Bürgerräte are now being widely used in Austria as launches for longer-term community sustainability projects (Local Agenda 21 projects). It seems that the high energy generated over the course of the 2 days

inspires a significant number of the randomly-selected participants in the Council to remain involved in a much longer process, post-launch. This broadens participation in these Local Agenda 21 projects beyond the "usual suspects" of community members with a prior history of involvement and engagement. As we shall see later on, another facilitator I interviewed also shared this perception. While I don't have quantitative evidence in support of this claim of broader participation, these councils continue to be used in Austria for this purpose.

Third *Bürgerrat* Narrative:

"Sometimes you have to be the first person who jumps into the sea"

The first narrative about the rural region with several Alpine villages, exemplified the challenge of "one topic is brought up… and in a second, everything changes in the room." In the following narrative, we will dive more deeply into a story that exemplifies a related challenge: that of holding space for an unpopular view during a *Bürgerrat*. We have already seen two previews of this narrative earlier, in response to the initial question about joys and challenges. What follows is the longer in-depth story about the council where a man was invited to express his unpopular opinion about the need to not "spare the rod".

Annemarie Felder is a highly experienced facilitator of *Bürgerräte*; by her count, she has facilitated 21 of these processes, and organized four others. (In what follows, ***bold italics are the translator's comments***, *regular italics are my own follow-up questions*):

> [The Council on the Future of Education] started on a Friday, midday, and I thought, "Ah, they think alike…" One woman was a teacher, and most of them said, "We have to involve the young people more, into what they want to learn, and how they want to learn, and be more flexible," and so... and then, I saw this man, because he doesn't say much, and he sits like this [arms crossed across chest]. And I thought, "Hmm..."
>
> And then there was a little break. In the break, I always try to contact the people that didn't say a lot till the break, how they feel and so. And he told me in the break, "This is *Frauengespräche* [women's talk]. They know nothing, of what's really important in life..."

And I asked him, “Is it okay, after the break I'll start, and ask you, because it's important to hear all opinions, and this is why we make a *Bürgerrat*, to hear different opinions.” And then he said, “Ja, ja, yes.”

The atmosphere then [in the room], we are all in the same opinions, we love each other, and all the world is good. And I know, “Huuh, now... I want to make this said before [have this be said in front of everyone]”, and so I was a little bit nervous. But I knew it's important, because I made a lot of moderation of *Bürgerräte*. This wasn't so, in the first five or six... now I know, I have to go first. When you are with a group, and you facilitate them, sometimes you have to be the first person who jumps into the sea.... ***into the cold water. You jump into the cold water. You have to make the first jump and somebody has to do it and have the courage to do it.***

And when I feel the courage [in the room] is not so big, so I take this courage, and I make the first step. And I know that maybe there are some people, in this moment, they hate me a little bit, but it's okay. I want to dive deeper... this is good when this is in day one, because the night is very good to think. And when it's not in the day one, it doesn't happen in day two. Because day two […] all the opinions and the process are going to close, so it's not possible.

There was one little bit that you said, that I didn't quite get... you said, this WAS amongst your first five or six? Or this was NOT in your first five or six Bürgerräte, that you have facilitated?

Later. Because the first *Bürgerräte*, I wanted to make perfect. I had not the courage to do something like this, because I wanted the people to think, "Wow, she really can facilitate in a good way." This was maybe *Bürgerrat* eight or nine.

Okay, so now we're up to, you've come back from break. And you invited this man to speak, and what happens next?

The women, they stand up and say, "No!" It was loud, and I really go to align to this man, that they know that energy cannot come into... ***into his space, that the energy from the women don't enter his space. So he's protected.*** I stand like this, so that the energy cannot come to the man, because they said words like, "*du spinnst, du hast einen Vogel,*" really hard… ***"you're crazy. You're nuts."***

Okay. So you physically positioned yourself, to keep their energy from going to him. And then, what did you do?

He told me all, he said how education works, in his opinion. I write it down by the solutions, and really, this was very different. All the solutions before, 20 solutions, was, "Well, ja..."

> and then [number] 21, "It is needed to hit the children..." I write it down. This was the moment I told before. It's really important that I'm empty, and I take it.
>
> *And then what happened, after you wrote that down? How did the other people react?*
>
> Very loud! As if, five people, they speak [all at once] and I said, "Stop, stop. I want to understand. I want to get this opinion."[…] And it was very strong for me to handle because the energy, they want always [she makes firing motions with her hands, and firing sounds]. I have to say, "Please, wait, please, please wait."
>
> *Oh, because you were still with him […] so you had to say, "Please wait." And you finished hearing him, and you finished writing what he said… And what was his response, as you were listening to him, and hearing him, and writing it down?*
>
> He was not very emotional. But the women, the two or three women, they were very, very emotional. And after that, I turn and go to this woman, and ask, "What is [going on] with you, when you hear the man? What is in your heart, or in your [gut]?" But also, I have to *schützen*... to protect the man. They say, to the opinion of the man, that "No, that's wrong. It makes children, that they don't feel what they want." So they... it was theoretic. What they know from the theory, they said.
>
> *And so you wrote that down as well...?*

A few things jump out at me as particularly meaningful in this case study thus far; to begin with, Annemarie's candidness in reflecting on her own development, and her acknowledgment of how her own willingness to risk conflict by actively welcoming differences has grown over time. This includes her ability to bear having participants "hate me a little bit," instead of basking in their admiration: "Wow, she really can facilitate in a good way." Another meaningful element throughout is her awareness and use of body language; both what she observes in others, and also, how she uses her own physical presence to energetically protect someone who has expressed a minority opinion.[39]

> *Anything else about how that day went?*

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[39] While this is something we teach in Dynamic Facilitation, it's a different experience to hear how it has been internalized by a facilitator.

Ja, one woman is in a social enterprise. She works with people who have psychological problems. And I think this was the shift, because she told a story from young people with psychological problems. And she told it in... *Beziehungsebene*...***she shared an example on the relational dimension, how that boy related to others because of his experiences, is that right? [conversation in German] Okay, this woman works in a psychiatric institution, and she helps kids who have trouble. And she helps them in the sense through building relationship to them, giving them responsibilities and helping them take responsibility. These boys start to heal through relationship, and not through hitting.*** Ja, genau. [Yes, exactly]. It was an example from this woman, of how education can work. I think this was the shift, because before, the man who said it needs this hitting and so, it's theoretical, and the woman also theoretical, the teacher. And after this, when one person goes deeper and shares experience, it goes in another layer.

So she shared that on day one. And you said, you felt that there was a shift then, in terms of the energy of the group, after she shared that?

Ja, the group. When one person starts with experience, the others also start with storytelling. In day one, the beginning often is.... it's comfort zone, when you talk about serious [topics], you can say, “it's not my [life]... I read this, or I hear this in the radio and TV” and they are theories. Theories are different. And then in day one, I can also ask, “have you made experience in your own life, that also... ***confirms this*?”**

So, as a facilitator, you can help them go deeper by asking, have you had an experience of this in your own life? But in this case, had you asked that, or did the woman just volunteer this experience?

In this *Bürgerrat*, I don't have to ask because she started. I think this is the best way, when the spirit of the group works, and so one person can take this and bring it to another, to the next deeper step. Because *meine haltung...* ***my whole stance and attitude*** to facilitate is, “*so wenig wie möglich einzugreifen*” ***to do as little as possible, to intervene as least as possible.***

What stands out here for me is the distinction that Annemarie is making between ideas and opinions (both of which she calls “theoretical”), and personal stories based on experience, which help others understand how we have arrived at our different ideas and opinions.

I also notice the creative tension between action and restraint. While Annemarie describes her stance as one of “doing as little as possible,” that stance is balanced by various description of facilitator actions that she clearly saw as necessary. These begin with actively drawing out the

conflict; earlier, she chose to be the "first person to jump into the cold water" by choosing to seek out during the break the man who did not seem connected to the process; upon hearing his very different perspective, she asked him whether he would be willing to speak in the group. And then, after he does so, she actively "protects" him from the ensuing fury that erupts in the room. At the same time, she expresses her commitment to "do as little as possible". She values that participants initiated the shift to sharing personal experiences, so she did not need to ask, "What experiences have you had in your life, that confirm (or inform) what you are saying?"

> *Anything else particularly notable before the end of that day? How would you say the feeling was, when that day one ended?*
>
> I think it's important that it goes away from "right or wrong". The theories are like the bread, different bread, and then, with the stories, [this is] like to put the hard bread into milk [an Austrian custom]. And then, all can share their stories, their experiences. And it's not only what they think, the "hats on", it's also heart shares. And then say, "Good evening. Good night."
>
> This is important, that all the hard bread is in the milk, before you say goodnight.
> [The "hard bread" of the differing views needs to be dipped into the "milk" of the personal stories, so the hard views can soften.]
>
> And so the attention, it's not only by this man. This is also important, that [it's] not one or two opinions, all are with their attention on this, and they discuss if it's right or wrong, or why it's wrong. It's important that the energy goes to the whole. And the man was... he doesn't speak a lot. But he.... Yeah, he was not so [shows me arms crossed across the chest]; instead, he was so [more open posture, arms by side.]
>
> *He was mostly silent, but he wasn't like this anymore. He didn't have his arms crossed. He was maybe more open, or listening, or not so guarded...?*
>
> And I'm very sure that he could be open, because he could also before share his opinion. Because it's not possible to be open, or to hear other opinions, when you are not feeling allowed to share your own.
>
> *So then, what happened on day two? Now we're in day two of the story…*

In day two, I start with [asking] what was overnight, how you feel [now], and it started with a lot of personal stories, because everyone has in their own biography, 8 - 10 years in school.... and they shared their own experience from what they know from their own time, when they went to school. And I think this is really because they went home and then they speak with other people, [who ask] what do you talk [about today]. I think, when it's the future of education, you will reflect your own years of education and how you feel.

If I may, just to clarify, you did not ask them to speak about their own educational experience... you just asked them, what do you feel right now? And they started with a lot of personal stories... And you're imagining that this is because when you're talking about the future of education, people start to reflect on their own educational experience… and did this man also share about his own experience?

Ja... And then he told an experience from when he went to school. And then, I had *eindruck*... ***I had the impression***... that he didn't want to tell this, but I think he was also surprised himself, that he told this to the group. I can remember he started with a story from a teacher he had, and then he went home and told this [message] from the teacher to his father. And then... then his voice turned into another tone.

And then he told what the Father said to him, and that the Father hit him… and.... really he had a voice that... it was very... still... and it was very silent in the room.

[*we had a moment of silence in our interview, also...*]

And it was really interesting because then, in the break, at day two in the break, at lunchtime, this man sat together to have lunch with this woman that the day before [had] said, "No, you are totally wrong! You, you, you..." They had lunch together. And they really speak very intensively together.

wow... [a moment of silence]
wow... [more silence]

There is still more to this story, but before continuing, I want to acknowledge several things: first, the moment of silence that spontaneously arises, when something meaningful happens. We will be seeing this again in some of the other narratives. Then there are the various metaphors at play here: the "hats on" sharing of beliefs, viewpoints, and perspectives, in contrast to the "heart shares," the personal stories based on experience, which give context to the different beliefs,

viewpoints, and perspectives. The stories are also the "milk" that the "hard bread" of the differing views need to be dipped into. In this situation, this process happened spontaneously, as a participant helped to shift the energy in the room by sharing a story from her own experience. Yet as Annemarie mentioned earlier, if needed she would choose to actively encourage this kind of shift by asking a prompting question, such as "Can you tell me what are the experiences you have had, that have shaped this belief?"

In this case, the unprompted shift toward sharing personal experiences continued; eventually, the man who is now more open to hearing others, having earlier been heard himself, ends up sharing a very personal story. Later he and another participant, who had been polarized on this issue, are able to connect in a meaningful way.

This next and last section starts out with a bit more difficulty, language-wise, as Annemarie describes her own addition to the *Bürgerrat* model. She has designed a sociometric circle format to offer participants the opportunity to reflect on their experience together; and during this closing circle, something surprising comes to light.

> *…and then, what happened?*
>
> The experience that I have, is at the end circle... **[*conversation in German*] *She is saying that "in the closing circle, there's something that revealed itself to me, that's why I still know the whole story quite well."***
>
> ***During the whole facilitation process, she just noticed at the end, what really happened. She knew something was going on, but she wasn't really conscious of the whole process... She usually does a certain kind of closing process, and the first question is sociometric. So, people don't sit in that circle. You have a card, and on that card, says... [more conversation in German]***
>
> *So, it's the closing circle...everyone is standing. And then... what is the first question you asked them?*

I asked, “What was the experience from the *Bürgerrat*, for your personal *Ebene*?”
What was your personal experience? [conversation in German] I think it's like a circle. And in the middle is 100 percent. Let's say if I had a really strong experience, I go to the middle and say, “This happened to me in the circle, I had a deep transformation, or whatever it is, because it's a hundred.”

Where the circle of chairs is, is zero. And then in the middle, is the card 100%, for impact for myself. It's silent. Everyone moves and when all are at their places, then I invite them to speak... [In this exercise, people move to stand anywhere from zero to 100%, to reflect how much impact the event has had on them.] Now they are there [in their place they have chosen] another man said, “what I experienced in my childhood, is not *gültig für [alles]*.... It's not the only truth for all.” ***Valid, it's not valid for everybody else. My experiences aren't valid for all.***

And the man who said, "what I experienced in my childhood is not valid for all," is he the man who had tears?

No, the man who had tears, he said, "I have changed my opinion."

Wow... [moment of silence]. And where was he standing, in terms of impact?

In the middle.

Oh, wow... [moment of silence]

Yeah, that was really a magic moment...

[After a pause] Was he the only one in the middle, or were there a few others also?

Yes, three or four in the middle. One woman said, "that's so [such] a healing experience when really people listen, listening to what I say.” That's the most [common] feedback, in the *Bürgerräte*. The people, they are so happy that someone listen. That someone is interested. What I feel, what I think, is interesting for other human beings.

Later on in the interview, Annemarie explained that she had based this three-part design[40] on the theme-centered intervention model of Ruth Cohn, a famous German-Jewish psychotherapist.

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[40] Annemarie’s sociometric closing circle format is described more fully in Appendix D.

For now, what is most relevant is that this closing circle format offered the facilitator an opportunity to realize how meaningful this experience had been for the participants. All three of us – facilitator, translator, and researcher, were moved in her retelling of it.

As a researcher, I was especially curious about how these meaningful moments affected the policy outcomes of the council, and so I asked a question along these lines. I was initially quite taken aback by Annemarie's response:

> *What do you see as the role of this particular incident, with regard to influencing the outcomes of the Council, in terms of the policy outcomes?*
>
> I think, not so much. The most impact was personal to the participants, how they act, how they feel, how they... *miteinandern umgehen*, how they interact with each other… and how they interact with people who [have] other opinions.
>
> *Ok, so just to check, this Council did produce policy outcomes, yes? Or recommendations…*
>
> Yep.
>
> *Ok, so you don't feel that this experience necessarily influenced those outcomes, but it influenced the people... So it didn't influence the outcomes in a good way or in a bad way, or it didn't get in the way of the outcomes?*
>
> Not much, no.
>
> *Ok... so it's almost like, it was operating at a different level […] and would you say then, that this is an additional benefit, in addition to the outcomes that were produced?*
>
> Often, the results are the same, the results from experts or from the people. The results, they are good, and the people stand behind these recommendations and results. But I think the most important for me, is that change the people made, they make the people feel deeper...they are more connected.
>
> And often they say, "Now I understand the work of politicians, that's not easy. When they discuss seven hours about an issue, and then had different opinions, also das... *Einfuehlungsvermoegen*?" ***Yeah, there's more empathy for politicians, more understanding.***

At this point, the translator could tell that I was surprised, and attempted to help me out by formulating a question:

> ***And maybe one thing, I'm not sure if it could have an influence on when they do the report-out of their recommendations, [that] the group is more as a unity? It might not be that the results are different, but the group as a unity, when they report out in the Bürgercafé? [conversation in German; the translator is checking out the response to his question with the facilitator.]***
>
> Yep, yep. At the beginning of mine [experiences facilitating councils], I was really sorry, because at the BürgerCafé when they present their results, I thought, "Wow, the others, they come, they only hear the results, but they didn't know something about the process." And after some years, this is [now] a fixed part of the presentation: when they speak about their results from the Bürgerrat, also a part is, "How I felt or how I *erlebt*? [literally, how did I "live" this experience?] How I felt the process, how was the process for me?"[41]

While I found Annemarie's response interesting, I wasn't quite ready to let go of the original question, so I persisted:

> *Yes, yes, so you invite them now, to speak about how the process was for them, as part of the BürgerCafe. Great… and, I do want to question a little bit.... you had mentioned that at the beginning, when they were on the theory level, they were having differences… And so I'm thinking, if they had NOT gone through this process, would they have been able to come up with a unified set of recommendations, given that they had these differences?*
>
> I make the answer in German, because it's a little bit complex. [conversation in German with translator] ***What she thinks, because he's kind of alone in that group, it wouldn't have been a substantial change in the recommendations. What happened is that they go like a "U curve", instead of straight [across]. They go deeper. And it's more a human experience for them as a group, because they went deeper. But in the end, the results are probably quite***

[41] A reminder for the reader, that the *BürgerCafé* (or citizens' café) is the open public meeting where the participants in the Citizen's Council share their findings. After the meeting sponsors (who are usually politicians and/or public administrators) welcome the public, the council members offer their presentation. The audience is seated at tables of four or six. After the members of the *Bürgerrat* conclude their presentation, the audience is invited to engage in small-group conversations at each table. Following the World Café format, the master or mistress of ceremonies offers a prompt for the small-group conversations. After 20 minutes or so, he or she invites participants to change tables, so they can meet others and then continue the conversations. Toward the end of the evening, there is a large-group report-out, where the hosts invite participants who wish to do so, to address the whole room, and share any insights or observations from the small-group conversations. What Annemarie is saying here, is that when the council presents their findings at the *BürgerCafé*, they are now encouraged to present something about the experience they lived, not just the outcomes of the council.

> ***similar. He would have just backed off […] He probably would have said it, and then just said, "Okay, we're different. We have different opinions," but in the end [the issue would be] resolved, because most of them had the same [opinions].***

This was a bit shocking for me. I had been so moved by the story… and *then*, to hear that from the perspective of the policy outcomes, it had little relevance! I could not stop ruminating on this, even as I completed the remainder of the interviews, transcribed them, and proceeded with the next steps in writing this dissertation.

Eventually, this paradox led me to considerations of how "participation makes better citizens" (Mansbridge, 1999), as well as to explore beyond the framework of deliberative democracy to a civic politics that is focused on democratic learning at all levels, along with the transformation of culture (Boyte et al., 2014). For now, I will return to the narratives, "zooming out" now to ones that shed some light on the context, the larger civic ecosystem in which *Bürgerräte* originated, as well as how they have been spreading.

Macro-Level Evolution of the Austrian Citizens' Councils

Learning more about how the *Bürgerräte* have spread and evolved over time in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland was *not* an explicit focus of my research, nor was it something that I asked the facilitators about directly. Instead, this was one of the simple yet unexpected findings. In the interview process, as the facilitators shared their experiences, their stories, and their insights, I heard bits and pieces about how this model was being used in other contexts, ones that differed from the initial one with which I was most familiar.[42] While *Bürgerräte* continue to be used to offer policy input to local government at the level of towns, cities, regions and states, their use has also expanded to other situations. Although I was not explicitly exploring the

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[42] The original Vorarlberg *Bürgerrat* model, as mentioned earlier, was pioneered by the *Büro für Zukunftsfragen* (now the *Büro für Freiwilliges Engagement und Beteiligung*) based on Jim Rough's Wisdom Council model with some significant additions (Zubizarreta et al., 2020).

diffusion of this innovation, my excitement and curiosity whenever that kind of material emerged, probably caused me to ask more follow-up questions that amplified the amount of information I received in this area.[43]

Youth Councils. One of the first areas of diffusion and adaptation that I heard about were the Youth Councils. Florian Sturm, the facilitator of the council on local sustainability we heard about earlier, offered this in response to an initial question about how he became a facilitator:

> In 2010, I started to work as an IT consultant. A bit later, inspired by this Pioneers of Change course, I went to a symposium on youth and politics: I was always interested in social issues. And there I met Rita Trattnig[44]; she held a course on Wisdom Councils there. I didn't attend it, but out of that, they formed a small group of young people, including me, who thought, “Yeah, we can do this. We want to do something with youth.” So that was in 2011. And in 2012, we held our first Youth Council. It's like a Wisdom Council, and it was only one day. The first one was in Wintag bei Freistaat, which is a tiny village in the center north of Austria.
>
> In the meantime, we were in touch with regional authorities, and they said, “Okay, cool. If you promise to do three of these Youth Councils in our region, then we will sponsor you [for] this education.” Jim Rough had a seminar in April 2012 in Vienna on Dynamic Facilitation, and we attended that. In 2012, I was still working as an IT consultant, which I continued to do until the end of 2013. And on the side, we had some youth projects in rather small municipalities. Or also in regions, regions that gather together several municipalities.
>
> We had six or seven of these Youth Councils. […] This was all in Upper Austria. I was living in Vienna, but I was doing these processes in Upper Austria. It's not so far, just two hours by train. […] We called ourselves “The Youth Council Team”, in German -- *JugendRat* Team. The Wisdom Council is the *Bürgerrat,* and the Youth Council is the *JugendRat*. We mostly

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[43] In addition to growing areas of application, I also learned about various practitioner experiments that are being carried out with the form itself, the small variations and mini-experiments which are a positive outgrowth of practitioners’ reflection on action, as well as reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983). An in-depth exploration of those variations is beyond the scope of this work, but they are included in Appendix C, and await further research.

[44] Rita Trattnigg was an active collaborator with the Büro für Zukunftsfragen during the initial stages of the development and implementation of the Vorarlberg Bürgerrat model. She worked in Vienna, for the Austrian National Government’s Ministry of Natural Resources and often visited Vorarlberg and the Büro für Zukunftsfragen to collaborate on their public engagement projects.

> did the whole process, in the sense of that we first did the set-up. We talked to the mayors and asked them, what kind of topics did they want to bring up? Or if there was something specific, we informed them about this.
>
> The setup of these Youth Councils was that we were always trying to get together a group of politicians or other interested persons from the municipality who would be the Resonance Group[45]. They would be the addressees for the results of the Youth Council, and would support the young people to get their ideas into the institutions. Or if there were project ideas, they would connect them with people who could support them with resources. So, we would brief this Resonance group. We would think of the design, we would work together with the municipality to find an appropriate location. And we would hold this day of Youth Council, and we would document it.
>
> Then we would hold a Youth Cafe, where the young people [from the Youth Council] would present their results to this resonance group, but also to the interested public. And that was mostly the end of the process, where we would hand over some kind of documentation to the Resonance Group. The idea was that the Resonance Group would be the interface, and they were also local.

At the time of our interview, Florian reported having facilitated more than 20 Councils. About two-thirds had been these Youth Councils (*JugendRäte)* and about a third had been Citizens' Councils (*Bürgerräte*).[46]

Bürgerräte and long-term sustainability projects. When I invited Florian to share a story about a particularly meaningful moment in a council, I learned about a second area of diffusion; state-funded local sustainability projects, part of "Local Agenda 21".[47] After choosing a moment from a council to explore in greater depth, Florian began by offering some context:

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[45] The Resonance Group is the same thing as what is called elsewhere a "Responders Group."

[46] While I did not pursue the topic of the *JugendRäte* further during that interview, I remain very interested in learning more, including how many others have been facilitating *JugendRäte;* how many *JugendRäte* have taken place in Austria overall; what their recruitment process is like, if it also involves some kind of sortition, and how that sortition is managed; what the outcomes of these *JugendRäte* have been, and so forth. These broader questions await a future research project.

[47] Agenda 21 is the non-binding sustainability action plan produced by the United Nations at the Earth Summit Conference in 1992, with the goal of achieving global sustainable development by the year 2000. The intention was that every local government would create their own Local Agenda 21 plan based on the same goals.

> In Upper Austria, for several years now, there's a citizen participation program, sponsored by the state, but also partially by the EU [European Union], where citizens in municipalities or cities are invited to develop future strategies called *ZukunftsStrategie*. So, they participate, they develop a paper on where does the municipality want to head to, what are the aims, what are the cornerstones of the development of this municipality. By design, it focuses on sustainability, on SDGs [an acronym for the UN's Sustainable Development Goals].
>
> There is money for municipalities who want to do that. This municipality, they are right now in the first half year of this process. It [the whole process] should be around one year, one and a half years. Upper Austria is giving extra money, 2000 more Euros, for municipalities who start this process with a Wisdom Council. In that way, Wisdom Councils have become a bit institutionalized in Upper Austria, at least. This Wisdom Council was not the first date or anything, but it was the first broader start of this participatory process for the municipality.
>
> Wisdom Councils have this great quality of motivating and including random new people. Usually, there's a core team for these [sustainability] processes, which is nominated by the mayor, or the ones who are politically active. They would say, "Ah, there's this person, he's into sustainability and energy, and he does this photovoltaic stuff, so include him, and then this woman, she's a teacher…" but there's a large fraction of the population they wouldn't know. And so, Wisdom Councils have proven to be a great way of engaging more and different parts of the population of a municipality, in these [sustainability] processes. Now, that's also the objective, and that's why the Wisdom Council is put at the beginning of such a process. It's a way of reaching out.

In the second case study earlier in this chapter, I shared the rest of the story; the memorable moment this facilitator described ("you can choose to buy a new car for yourself, or to put solar panels on your roof: what does your grandchild profit more from?"), what led up to that moment, and what ensued afterward. Here I am focusing on how and why *Bürgerräte* have become recommended as "best practice" for beginning these longer-term sustainability projects in communities. As Florian mentioned, the sortition-based nature of the councils has made them a useful way of bringing "more and different parts of the municipality" into these sustainability projects. As we saw earlier, at the conclusion of this 2-day *Bürgerrat*, the organizers invited participants to join the core organizing team for this longer-term local sustainability project; about a quarter of these randomly selected people chose to accept the invitation.

Later, in another interview, I heard more about how *Bürgerräte* are being used in this way. This time it was Andrea Binder-Zehetner, a facilitator from Vienna, who responded to the initial question of "how did you become a facilitator?" as follows:

> I worked about nearly 20 years in the official citizen participation in the Local Agenda 21. And therefore, it was interesting for us, to get to know a new method of involving people. And this random selection was interesting for us, because usually in the Local Agenda, the people come when they have some idea, or they are driven by emotions to change something.
>
> In Austria, we have a network of people working in Local Agenda 21 processes. And it was in Vorarlberg, when I learned the Bürgerrat method. It's interesting to the people... you have more time to discuss a topic. And then they want to stay involved, because they know about the topic more.... and they have a lot of energy, after the Bürgerrat.
>
> Not *all* of them, but [sometimes] half of the people, then they say "okay, we want to continue to work on this topic." And then we can say, "Okay, within the Local Agenda, we have the possibility to support you longer." They develop recommendations, and they can go on to work on [implementing] these recommendations.

I asked Andrea about her role in the councils she had been involved with -- whether in addition to being part of the facilitation team, she had also been part of the design team or consulting team in some way, for the pre-work or the follow-up work:

> Yes, yes. Especially the case of Local Agenda, I didn't so much facilitate, because I was more in the consulting team. So, how to do it: "What is the topic? What is the question of the topic? What will we write in this letter, to invite the people?" How many people will we invite, and such things… Because it's very, very important [to attend to these details].

I also wondered whether, when *Bürgerräte* are connected with a Local Agenda project launch, they also include a *BürgerCafé*, where the group reports out to a larger public gathering:

> Yes, we did that, because at the district level, we have politicians from different parties. And so we invite them to attend, we invite other citizens if they are interested. And we also invite people from the administration. So, we usually also do this *BürgerCafé*. Also, maybe we get a larger group of people who want to do something.

So it seems the original design is followed rather closely, although the elements have been repurposed a bit. In the original context, the *BürgerCafé* is an opportunity for the public to respond to the recommendations, as well as for politicians and administrators to see what the public response is to those recommendations. In the context of a Local Agenda 21 project, an additional purpose is to see whether some of that larger public might end up choosing to *participate* in the ongoing work of the longer-term sustainability project.

I then asked about the differences between hosting a *Bürgerrat* that's *not* connected with Agenda 21, and hosting a *Bürgerrat* that *is* connected with Agenda 21 -- was the only difference the funding source, or were there other differences between the two?

> No, the main difference is *what to do* with the results of the *Bürgerrat*. Because with Local Agenda 21, we have an instrument to work with these results, to say, "Okay, they think about climate protection, then they want to have a market, a market with goods coming from nearby," or they want some action to have less cars in the street, in the parking lot, to reduce parking lots or to promote cycling, and so on. So, they have some recommendations, some ideas for what should be done at the district level. And with Local Agenda, we can help them to implement these things, in discussion with the politicians or the administration.
>
> And in the other case [when it's not connected to Local Agenda 21] -- for example, in Eisenstadt, the capital of Burgenland, a federal state of Austria -- they discussed a concept of how to design the city in new ways. Then the citizens develop different recommendations for the city of Eisenstadt 2025. But afterwards, then it stopped [meaning that the people who had been on the Citizens' Council did not remain involved.]
>
> I was a facilitator; sometimes it goes on a little bit, as there is a *BürgerCafé*, that's always part of it. And sometimes you have another discussion only with politicians. But then, there's nothing. And then, how it will go on? I don't know. I have no influence… In both cases the *Bürgerrat* is interesting, and it's a good way for discussing the topics. But in the Local Agenda, it was a little bit better, to go on with work. [Meaning that she as an organizer and facilitator, can continue to support the citizens who were involved in the Council, or at least those who choose to continue with the longer project.]

This response brings to mind Boyte's (1999) distinction between "civic work," where citizens are co-creating something (in this case, the citizens who are involved with the Local

Agenda 21 project) in contrast to deliberative consultation practices, where citizens are mainly giving recommendations for public officials and administrators to implement. At the same time, there is also some area of overlap here. As we heard earlier in the responses to the "joys and challenges" questions, even in councils that have been convened for consultation purposes to offer input on a policy issues, sometimes citizens are inspired to continue acting and learning on their own after the conclusion of the Council. And on the other end of the spectrum, even in these councils where by design, citizens have support to continue working together afterward to realize their vision, the funding that supports this is provided by government. Thus, in both cases government is involved to some degree; also in both cases, some degree of self-initiated civic renewal is taking place. Still, the example of how *Bürgerräte* have been successfully applied in the Local Agenda 21 context illuminates the possibility of this format being used in a community organizing context, rather than "only" as a consultative mini-public. Yet even when used in a consultative context, the Citizen's Café and the Responders Group (also known as the Resonance Group)[48] are two design elements in the Citizen's Council model that serve increase the likelihood of the implementation of (at least some of) the council's recommendations.

Ecosystems of Civic Co-Creation

Another aspect of the *Bürgerräte* that arose from the interviews was a deeper appreciation of the context in which they initially arose. In the state of Vorarlberg, the *Büro für Freiwilliges Engagement und Beteiligung* (Office for Volunteer Engagement and Participation), formerly the *Büro für Zukunftsfragen* (Office for Future-Related Issues), can be understood as a public administration department shaped by the leadership of "democratic professionals"; that is, professionals with a deeply democratic commitment to use their professional position to create

[48] the Responders Group was initially described on page 22.

opportunities for lay participation (Dzur, 2019.) Two of the professional facilitators whom I interviewed for this project are long-time administrators at the *Büro*, including the current director and another long-time staff member; six others are professional consultants who work frequently for the *Büro*.[49]

Although my snowball sample resulted in only one research participant from the Austrian state of Salzburg, the interview with this public administrator offered valuable insights into how the *Bürgerrat* process took root in his state while demonstrating his own engagement with participatory processes. Thus, I learned some relevant history and context of the *Bürgerräte* in each of these Austrian states.

Civic innovation in Vorarlberg. One way to understand the commitment to public engagement present at the Voralberg *Büro* is to explore some of the *other* practices that they also support, within their ecosystem of civic renewal. I will begin with Bertram Meusburger, a public administrator who is also a professional facilitator, and his response to the question of how he ended up in his current position:

> For 10 years of my profession, I had this mixture of being a teacher, a biology teacher, and also at that time doing a lot of art, dancing, and organizing festivals and workshops. And then I came to the Office of Future-Related Issues. Manfred Hellrigl invited me to come in because he wanted to bring a closer connection from the Office to work with younger people. And because he knew that I did a lot of project work in schools, he asked me to work in the office and that was in 1998. So I'm here for 24 years. A couple of years ago, the *ZukunftsBüro* became the Office for Engagement and Participation.
>
> I have also a profession in group dynamics, and have worked a lot with groups. And therefore, this work for participation here in the Office matched very well. I started to work with communities in the field of Sustainable Development, and did a lot of projects here with younger people. And 12 years ago or so, we came in contact with Art of Hosting. And there was a good match of group dynamics, and the knowledge or understanding of Art of Hosting

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[49] This informational webpage on the *Bürgerräte* introduces 20 different practitioners who offer "accompaniment" (professional facilitation) for local government-sponsored Bürgerrate in Vorarlberg; see https://www.buergerrat.net/at/vorarlberg/akteure/begleitung/

> as a methodology or attitude, where you encourage people to participate better in groups, also in communities and regions, or in associations. This was one of my main fields here in the office where I worked. I hosted about 16 trainings and a lot of workshops, and developed the ProjektSchmiede, a special application which helps to transfer the knowledge you get in a training to everyday life challenges.
>
> Because for many people […] as it is in every field, it's one thing to have a training and to learn it, and another to transform it in your association, in your organization, in the community. Because the challenges there […] *seem* often, quite different. We did a lot of work in how to translate those knowledges, into everyday life situations.

I had known for some time that in addition to organizing *Bürgerräte*, the *Büro* has also been very active in offering Art of Hosting trainings in their region; these trainings are notable for welcoming a mix of professionals and laypeople, and are a useful way to develop group skills more broadly among the population at large. In the interviews I conducted for this project, many of the facilitators mentioned their in-depth experience with Art of Hosting; some of them lead workshops in it. Yet what was new and intriguing here, was Bertram's statement about having worked to help people "translate those knowledges to everyday life situations." Thus, toward the end of his interview, after we had explored his experience with and perspectives on the *Bürgerräte*, our conversation transitioned back to this earlier topic:

> […] very often actually, after *Bürgerräte*, people say, "It's so incredible that we don't know each other, and people can just have a good time with each other and learn from each other. And so valuable." And so often, people are very astonished that there are such good methodologies. But the problem is always how to bring them [the people] in the room.
>
> And we have the same experience with the Art of Hosting training; so many people are astonished and enthusiastic about it. But for some people, it is very difficult to come to trainings, especially for some people those three days are much too long. For people who have leadership jobs, or politicians, they have very often difficulties. And we learned that we have to find a way, a method that is an opener for them, to get a feeling of what *could be done*, with those methodologies.
>
> We don't "sell" those methodologies, we don't offer methodologies [as an end in themselves], we offer *help for your projects* -- very pragmatic, very easy to connect.

> The *ProjektSchmiede*[50] is only one afternoon. And many are astonished—"How is it, that other people who don't know me *at all*, are interested in my project, and think with me, about my project?" And, "It's just such a good feeling in this afternoon… it feels like an hour, but it has been four hours!" And then they get interested: "What's behind that? What's the process?" Usually, most of the people do not even use the word "process", because they are not in that field. And so, they just get curious, how it works. It's an opener for them. "Ah, we have to do more!" And then we can tell them, "Try a training."
>
> In the [Art of Hosting] trainings, we often also offer Dynamic Facilitation in a short period, in a Methodology Café. I would say that's the learning in our region; how people learn [in the ProjektSchmiede] that everybody can learn communication, and work in groups.

What stands out for me in this story is how the Vorarlberg *Bürgerräte* do *not* exist in isolation; instead, their use grew out of the commitment of democratic professionals to a larger civic ecosystem, a "civic renewal" system. I am intentionally *not* calling this a "deliberative system", as the monthly *ProjektSchmiede* do not offer a deliberative format per se. People arrive for an afternoon, *not* to deliberate public policies, but to participate in something we might describe as a barn-raising for local projects. At this community gathering, participants work in small groups; in each group, one person is describing a social entrepreneurship project they have initiated, while the other three participants offer their input to the project-initiator. All of this takes place in a structured format that combines design elements from both World Café and Open Space Technology, in order to create a very effective and participatory small-group peer-coaching format.[51]

While not deliberative, this experience is definitely communicative and co-creative. Instead of a sortition-based process, this is an open public invitation to community members to attend an

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[50] A description of the ProjektSchmiede will follow in the next few paragraphs.

[51] The generic name for the *ProjektSchmiede* format is Pro-Action Café, and here are some websites where you can learn more about it: https://www.plays-in-business.com/proaction-cafe/ and http://aositoronto.weebly.com/proaction-cafe.html In Vorarlberg, it has been renamed *ProjektSchmiede*, which literally means "Forge for Projects," as in a metal-smithing forge.

event where they can connect with their neighbors, either to make a meaningful contribution to others, or receive support with their own project. This barn-raising for local projects where participants engage in multiple small-group structured brainstorms, serves many related functions; in addition to being a practical and enjoyable opportunity for community-building, it is also a learning opportunity to practice peer collaboration.

Community members who have attended one or more of these monthly 3-hour *ProjektSchmiede* and who express an interest in learning more are invited to attend a 3-day Art of Hosting training, sponsored by State's Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation (*Büro für Freiwilliges Engagement und Beteiligung*). There, community members can experience and learn a variety of basic group collaboration formats[52]. Thus, in addition to the intrinsic value of the *ProjektSchmiede,* these monthly gatherings also serve as a doorway to further capacity-building opportunities. In turn, lay community members who attend an Art of Hosting training in Vorarlberg, may have the opportunity to participate in a small introduction to the advanced practice of Dynamic Facilitation, the "operating system" for the *Bürgerräte*.[53]

Democratic Innovation in Salzburg. The interview with Josef Hörmandinger, a public administrator from the neighboring state of Salzburg, offered some insights into another local democratic system. Josef serves as chief-of-staff in the Salzburg State Parliament, and has played a significant role in initiating the spread of the *Bürgerräte* in his State. Here is his response to the question of how he had come to be in his current role:

> When I first came into contact with Wisdom Councils or Dynamic Facilitation, […] I was the head of the *Büro* of the President of the Salzburg State Parliament. And I took on the habit to

[52] For more on AoH trainings, see https://artofhosting.org/

[53] At this point, this is an "only in Vorarlberg" phenomenon; in the rest of the world, Art of Hosting does not yet include Dynamic Facilitation within its otherwise quite varied basket of practices. This is understandable given that the spread of DF to date has mainly taken place within German-speaking countries.

> do one personal growth or lifelong learning project a year, and I stumbled upon Jim Rough's seminar, which he held in Vienna at the time.
>
> I thought to myself, why not try this new form of democratic innovation? […] I went to the seminar and came back enthusiastic […] and then I went to my boss and told him, "We all are permanently looking for new kinds of political representation, or of democratic participation, and I think I might have found something that already works in other places like Vorarlberg. [It's something] we can compromise about across partisan borders […] so we could really carry this through as a common project of the state, offering a new kind of interface to the public."
>
> And then something happened that opened a window of opportunity. There was a big political scandal in Salzburg about huge sums of money, which were obviously borrowed, and being speculated with on the international scene. It was around 9 billion euros over a couple of years, which is quite a big amount for a small state. And this led to the end of the government back then, and two elections. After those elections, virtually every party said, "We want more control by the people. And we want more participation of people in politics, because this is what obviously went wrong in the past." And so, I had a chance to take my idea and put it into practice.
>
> The new government said, "We need innovation in all those areas." And the new President of Parliament, she came across with the idea of a Special Committee of the Parliament that could work on those innovations. And I said to her, "Let's do it by the way of a *Bürgerrat*. Or, let us at least implement a *Bürgerrat* […] to advise or to inform the Special Committee about what people really want. Instead of just guessing what people might want, or doing interviews […] let's do a *Bürgerrat* and find out."
>
> This is what we did. We did it on democratic innovation, on what kind of participation Salzburg needs. This was the topic. There was unanimous decision to carry out the *Bürgerrat*, which was a hint that the whole thing was cross-partisan, as everybody could agree on carrying it through. So we were the first Statewide Wisdom Council or *Bürgerrat*. And then the [executive branch of] government took up the idea and did a couple of others on different topics; on traffic and transport, on asylum seekers, or migration as a whole […]

Thus we learn that this Special Committee of the State Parliament was the first to seed the *Bürgerräte* in the state of Salzburg, in response to a moment of political crisis that provided an opening for exploring a new form of public engagement. (This theme of political crisis being an opening for *Bürgerräte* also came up during the focus group conversation, as we shall see later

on.) Josef is another exemplar of Dzur's "democratic professionals"; beyond doing his job as narrowly defined, he enacts his personal and professional commitments to creating more opportunities for public participation. His initial efforts eventually led to significant results: after the success of the initial *Bürgerrat* in Salzburg, the governor's office became interested and initiated several more. However, during the year and a half this Special Committee was in existence, something else of note took place:

> […] I have to mention probably, that we were also DF'ing[54] the Special Committee of the State Parliament, before the *Bürgerrat* even happened. Because we started the Special Committee of the State Parliament with the topic "*Bürgerräte*". And we had Rita Trattnigg and Dr. Hellrigl with us in one of the sessions, and they [enticed] the members of the committee into being DF'ed for one hour or so, on a concrete question like, "What do we expect from our work in this Special Committee?"
>
> And this experience was so deep that those hardcore politicians, hardcore members of parliament with years of political experience behind them, had the wish that *every* topic on the list of this Special Committee in the months to come, should be, at the beginning at least, DF'd for one session. You can always talk about it in a political way afterwards, you can do political bargaining as soon as this is done, but the first session, when they first try to take up a new topic, they wanted a DF session.
>
> Back then, we were lucky, we had some people already within one of the units of the State Administration --a unit that's normally concerned with organizational change processes, and mediating and so on -- and three of them already had DF training by Matthias zur Bonsen[55] at that time. So we had some people we could always rely on, to DF our committee sessions.

It was significant to learn that as part of this Special Committee's interest in sponsoring the first *Bürgerrat* in Salzburg, they themselves had an opportunity to experience this creative facilitation process as participants. The outcome was that they chose to engage in this process on

[54] The initials for Dynamic Facilitation are often used as a verb (to DF a group.) This is shorthand or jargon for "to facilitate using the Dynamic Facilitation approach."

[55] Matthias zur Bonsen is the consultant who initially brought Jim Rough to teach in Germany. He now leads German-language Dynamic Facilitation seminars on a regular basis, for consultants who work with business or government.

a repeated basis, in order to support their work as a committee. Thus, during a period of time, there was an interesting "parallel process"[56] taking place within the larger system of the state of Salzburg; while the Special Committee was planning and organizing a *Bürgerrat* on the topic of "What kind of public participation in government, do we need in the state of Salzburg?", they were also repeatedly experiencing the core of this creative process internally, as a way to deepen and enhance their own meetings (Trattnigg & Haderlapp, 2014).[57]

Yet my interest in learning whether Dynamic Facilitation was still being used at present within the Parliament elicited a sobering response:

> Most of the politicians that were members of the Committee, are no longer inside politics. So this potential is probably gone. And I don't know if this kind of culture, of 'encountering culture', would still be possible today. I'm doubtful; I don't know. The people that got [newly elected] into Parliament have not been a part of this little glimpse into a new political culture. And so, they do not share this experience.
>
> What you would have to do is --and this is one of the disadvantages of democratically constituted parties, right? -- what you would have to do is build this whole potential, completely from scratch. You would have to take new people and say, this is in our organizational DNA, you [need to] learn to do things this way. But I'm afraid this culture does not really exist, because it was experimental when we did it back then.

Thus I learned that this initial instance of working with Dynamic Facilitation to support a creative deliberation process among parliamentarians was short-lived, and came to a natural end

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[56] An organization development term that means that two or more dyads in a system are experiencing a similar process. This can be happening unintentionally, or by design; the process that is being "echoed" in another part of the system may be a harmful one, or a helpful one. The concept itself can be used as a diagnostic tool, and/or as a way to design effective interventions.

[57] From Dobson's theoretical perspective in "Listening for Democracy," this could be described as peer-to-peer politicians seeking to avail themselves of a structure that encourages "apophatic listening", where one is "opening the self to the other and holding one's categories in abeyance" (Stanton & Warner, as quoted in Dobson, p. 70). This is in contrast to the more common "cataphatic listening,",which offers the "appearance of listening but in such a way as to reproduce relations of power rather than have them challenged" (p. 68). In more everyday language, Stephen Covey (1989) describes this distinction as "listening to understand" rather than "listening to respond."

when the work of the Special Committee was complete. Nonetheless, that committee accomplished a significant level of institutionalization of the *Bürgerräte* before it disbanded:

> What we [Parliament] also did is, we passed legislation similar to Vorarlberg, to implement alternative forms of participation into the State Constitution. And we passed a list of quality gdescriptions that *Bürgerräte* in Salzburg would have to meet, which was basically the state of the art that the State of Vorarlberg had at the time.
>
> [Then] we had another election in 2018, one year prior to when the normal term would have ended. So, the *Bürgerräte* that were already in the pipeline could not be carried out anymore at that time. But the new government after that, that is still in power, wrote into their government agreement -- because it's a multi-party government -- that they plan to carry out at least one Bürgerrat per year. [So far] we had two full *Bürgerräte*, and we had two more […] Wisdom Councils that only last one day. Because we found out that people get motivated more easily, if they only have to spend one day with a certain project, and do not have to stay overnight or two consecutive days. This is a new kind of "short *Bürgerrat*" if you like, and we did a couple of those also.

Given the traditional separation of powers between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, Josef was not involved in any of the subsequent councils that took place after their sponsorship shifted to the executive branch. However, he still has some strong memories from that first *Bürgerrat* in Salzburg, which he had helped to initiate and organize, and where he was present as a witness – and which we will turn to next.

Fourth *Bürgerrat* Narrative: "In this setting, it had an effect"

When asked about a memorable moment from that *Bürgerrat*, Josef responded as follows:

> […] this was an elderly woman, already retired, and she was from a part of Salzburg that is remote from the Capital. It takes a couple of hours to go there by car. And she had been on a mountain farm pretty much all of her life, and the education that she probably had, was eight years of grammar school, and that's it. But… because you always have the idea that political participation is for somebody like me, right? Middle-aged, white academic men, that are well-connected to media and certain kinds of elites […] and who could always make themselves heard and who know how to pull strings to get things done.
>
> But this woman had obviously no problem to participate in this Wisdom Council, and […] in a very gentle voice, just said [that] what she misses most in politics, or in the way people talk

with each other, is that there is only little *Güte* [goodness, kindness, or benevolence – see below] within politics. And that people do not really take care of each other, when trying to negotiate how to live together. And she didn't say much more than that. She always would say little pieces now and then, in the course of those one and a half days -- but when she said *this*, I felt that people would change their mindset of what they wanted to accomplish in this Wisdom Council. For me, it was a masterful example of a very authentic, very open and sensitive intervention, into what was happening.

Güte comes from "good", from the word "good"…. *güte* is a way to interact with other people, with a certain mindset; with the mindset that the other person is also a human being, and has vulnerabilities and needs, and that I as a person, have to address those as well. Even if we are not agreeing on everything. Or even if we are on opposite sides, in a kind of struggle.

There is some research that clearly shows that cooperation among humans is their default setting. So, this idea that people would fight each other, at the very moment that civilization breaks down or some other big catastrophe happens -- there is no evidence for that, in any kind of social research. If you think of New Orleans -- the thing that really happened, there is this congressional report -- the things that really happened, were that the people would help each other.

And so, this was a proof, that you can create a room where everybody could be heard in a meaningful and influential way without regard to […] social-cultural environment, gender, or skills, or upbringing. Because in our public you can always speak up of course, nobody will prevent you; in very seldom cases only, will you be prevented from actually speaking up. But are you *heard*, also? Or is what you say, meaningful to others? And when she said this very simple thing, it still had meaning and influence in this situation. It changed something.

At least within a Wisdom Council, somebody saying something like this, was actually heard and had an influence. I mean […] where would you have a setting inside politics where appealing to *Güte* would change *anything* -- aside from being laughed at? Because everybody is so "realpolitik", and everybody is professional and knows the game, and so on. But just appealing to this kind of human truth, could be heard inside a Wisdom Council. Probably couldn't be heard anywhere else, but in this setting, it had an effect.

I was curious to hear more, about what Josef had observed, that had him to conclude that this statement had had an effect on others. What had he seen, heard, or felt, that had led him to this conclusion?

> I think that people have a certain look in their face when they are touched, really, really touched inside, by something... And there was a moment of silence, after that. There was nobody who was, "Oh, she's finished already with her stuff, so I can start and bring my thought." But there was really a moment of silence…
>
> And people who were looking at her, were really caught by the thought that she just had mentioned. Not being dissociated and having to think about it or reflect about it, but really, this went right into the stomach.

As we saw already in the third case study, these rich moments of silence can happen naturally in a group, whenever something particularly meaningful has taken place. They also occurred *within* the research interviews from time to time, whenever something particularly meaningful was shared. Josef and I took a spontaneous moment of stillness to appreciate the resonance of this story, and allow its impact to sink in. Afterward, I wondered about the *BürgerCafé* that followed this council. How had that gone?

> I think very well. It was completely experimental because participation projects... political participation projects are always easy and entertaining and enriching, as long as you do not connect them to politics (laughter). The moment that you have to bring these formats or people or groups in contact with politicians, things can go terribly, terribly wrong.
>
> And closing this interface with a *BürgerCafé* was really experimental for us. But the attending politicians were really very professional; some of them, you could see that they believed that this is, right now, really important. It might not change their thinking, it might not change any of their decisions. But what happened there, is not any kind of blah, or "the common people now want this and that" talk.
>
> But they got the feeling that this group of people, the members of the group, really had risked a lot, by participating and being there. And that taking this risk, was really because they believed in our way of living together, which is a democratic way of living together. And the politicians were impressed, by this authentic endeavor.

Again, I was curious what had informed Josef's perspective. Was it their body language, was it things that were said afterwards, was it...?

> At the beginning of the World Café, the group, and the speakers of the group, presented the results […] And the way that the whole group would stand around and behind them, you

> could feel that this was something that they came up with, in a special way of togetherness… in a special way of being connected.
>
> And that this is not a randomly selected group anymore, but it became something different, a group that has developed a shared idea and that has made the experience that, "Hey, it is really possible to talk to others and meet, meet somebody who I can share my ideas with and not be opposed, but come up with something even better, together." And this leaves an impression on people, I think. And when talking about this process, this impression can be seen by others. And I think it could be seen back then.

Thus we return here to a theme that was mentioned in the initial section on joys and challenges; the impact it can have to witness the sense of connection and solidarity that has developed within a group, that has experienced a meaningful journey together. Witnessing this transformation, when it occurs, was one of the things that facilitators reported most enjoying about this process.

Fifth *Bürgerrat* Narrative: "It's like family"

The next facilitator, Markus Goetsch, had facilitated four Bürgerräte, and been part of the design team for one of those instances. He also had experience with using a similar format with business organizations; a creative Dynamic Facilitation deep-dive with a randomly selected microcosm group, followed by reporting out to the larger whole. One notable thing about this interview was that, unlike the councils we have looked at so far, which were either initiated by local governments as a public consultation process or else initiated by a government-funded community organizing process like the Local Agenda 21, the council described below was the collaborative initiative of three non-profits:

> The *ZukunftsRat* (Futures Council) on the Future of Democracy was the first national Wisdom Council in Austria. It was grassroots-funded by three NGOs: *Respekt.net*, *IG-Demokratie*, and *MehrDemokratie*. It took place in Salzburg in September; that's the one where I was part of the design team.

Markus readily identified two special moments that had taken place within this council, which we later proceeded to explore in greater detail:

> One [special moment] was this older woman who didn't really speak a lot or say a lot. And then she said, "You know, it's about consensus. It's about family. Politics should be like family." That's what she said. She had a large number of siblings, and for her, the family was like politics, or democracy. When they did something on the weekends with her parents, only four of her siblings could come with them, because they didn't have a bigger car. And so, it was always about negotiating and talking to each other. And that changed the whole atmosphere; her input there, was a shift for the whole group.
>
> And then there was an older man, a business man, in that same council. And he had an awakening, that women actually also want to contribute to society. [At first] he said, "Women should not work. Women should stay at home, women should raise kids." And afterwards, he actually said, "Yeah, I learned, I learned."
>
> *Let's start with the context, and what led up to those moments. You were saying this is a national Wisdom Council, that had been sponsored by three different nonprofits?*
>
> So, it's *IG-Demokratie*, and then *Mehr Demokratie*. And the last one, *Respect.net*; they have a crowdfunding platform, and they do a lot of crowdfunding projects, public projects; and we raised 50,000 Euros for this. […] *Statistics Austria* has a database of all people living in Austria. And we would have really liked to get access to that, but we were denied access. And what we did then, was we bought addresses from the Postal Service. They offer that; you can select what segment you want to reach, and they sell that. It's one of their marketing tools, how they make money. And we just bought a random selection of their whole database.
>
> It was, for the first time, all of Austria. And it was a Wisdom Council without a political mandate. What's happening today[58] is that they're handing [the outcomes] over to the Parliament, as recommendations for the politicians.
>
> *Okay. I'm kind of getting ahead of myself, but was there a BürgerCafe?*
>
> Yes, there was. Because we couldn't really invite them on another occasion, and because it was Austria-wide, we said we were going to have the *BürgerCafé* right after the Wisdom Council. So, we had the whole day Saturday. And we ended on Sunday around two in the afternoon, three the latest. And then at five, we had the public presentation. And it was in Salzburg, and it was streamed online, as well.

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[58] This interview took place on 2/17/22.

This was the first I was hearing about a *Bürgerrat* in Austria sponsored by non-profits and crowdfunding, instead of by the government. Given that the memory was fresh on Markus' mind, we went ahead with diving more deeply into the special moments from this council:

> *And so you were one of the facilitators, as well as one of the designers… So we're going to build up to there [those special moments], and this might feel a little slow at times. Just take me through, as though I didn't know what a Bürgerrat is.*
>
> We basically welcomed them. We had a check-in, in a circle, about how they heard about the Wisdom Council or what their reaction was. Of course, the three representatives of those three NGO's did a little presentation and said hello, welcomed everybody and told them about the process. And then we facilitators were introduced, and then we changed the room a little bit, and had the flip charts there and made the half circle, and we also had a graphic facilitator. And then we started with the DF.
>
> [The initial question was] "How do you want to live in this democracy? And what needs to change, basically? How can it be more livable, for every one of us?" I remember that the males of that group were trying to be in their dominant roles; the females, when they said something, it was to the point and I think they helped shift [the energy] a lot.
>
> Especially one woman, she also had a little purge when she said [that] she's from the Turkish community and for her, everything is double the effort, and it's double as hard to succeed. First of all, because she's Turkish, and then, because she's a woman. She had to learn that the hard way, that she will always have to be twice as good.
>
> *And how do you think that impacted the group? What seemed to happen, when she told that?*
>
> I think it gradually opened. For example, the businessman, I think he realized there's more than his horizon, more than his narrow point of view. There are parts of society that he just can't see, and struggles that he doesn't even know of.
>
> I think in that first morning, they all just came with their opinions, basically. They were very strong in their opinions. A lot of it is coming back, as I talk… There was a woman from South America. And in the first check in, she said every one she asked from her community, if she should go [to the Council], said "No, no, this is dangerous, don't go."
>
> And she said that she realized, she will never find out [if she doesn't go]. And then she came. When they offered her childcare for her daughter, she came with her daughter. She brought

her daughter, and there was a [staff] person there, who played with her daughter. And her daughter was in the room as well, and actually made three really nice paintings of us.

Later, the mother said where she comes from, politics are always, always considered to be corrupt. This is her experience of democracy. And she realizes that what she experiences in that room, is what democracy should feel like and be like. So that was really nice…

So, we're still wanting to build up to this woman who talked about her family… In the first day, at the beginning, you were saying in the morning, men were in the more dominant role; women... what they said was to the point. And at first, everyone came with their own opinions […] Any other significant things that happened that first day?

Yeah, I think that the older businessman, he laid out his worldview. He laid it out like this: "The whole problems of society has to do with women not staying at home, but all of a sudden wanting to do male jobs. And that way, the kids are home alone, and it creates trouble. If you need somebody else for childcare, it costs a lot of money. And so, it starts a spiral of changes that are all destructive for the family, as the only the core of society."

And what did you do as a facilitator, when he said that? Pretend I don't know DF.

Okay, you welcome everything that people say, and you reflect it back, and you help them. Sometimes you help them say what they want to say, and you write it down on a flip chart. In the DF process, you have a problem statement, and you have info / data, and you have the concerns, and the solutions. And basically, you can always go from one chart to the next chart; it's like a dance between the charts, if you will.

[If there is] a concern, you have three options, you can ask them, "Tell me more..." Or you can ask them […] "How can you put this as a question, or a problem statement?" Or, you could just ask them what their solution is to that particular problem.

This man had *all* the solutions…he totally knew where all the problems of society come from! And then the answer by the Turkish lady and one younger woman who is a therapist… I could feel their aggression, in the way they responded to what the guy had said. There was a strong rejection of basically every single sentence, and they just laid out their point of view, that they want to be free, and not be held like slaves.

And they also were being listened to by the facilitator; I am stating the obvious...

Yes, of course. They were seen with what they said, and also reflected from an empathetic level. How it makes them feel, and what they need in that particular moment. And I think that

> was exactly also the point where the woman with Turkish origins came in. And her suffering. She's not just a woman, but she's also Turkish. And then it got a little bit away from the male/female conflict. And there was one more issue that also happened, I can't quite remember how that came. But I think all that led to the older woman saying what a good way of living together means for her, and how democracy should be like, and life in general. And she just said, “it's like family.”
>
> And then I got curious, and I asked, “What do you mean with, it's like family?” And then she said, “Well, it's like family, it's like you make decisions, like in a family.” And I'm like, “Hmmm.... tell me more.” I didn't quite know what she was referring to. So, one of the facilitators' roles is also to get specific. I just had a feeling with her saying “it's like family,” that there was much more information, valuable information for all of them in the group, than “just like family…”
>
> [At first] she really didn't understand, what *I* cannot understand, when she says “family”! “It's just family!” “But tell me more, about what is family for you?”
>
> And then… and then we learned that she had so many siblings! Seven or eight of them, I don’t remember… And that probably her experience of family felt like democracy in a way, where you have to see everybody and sense into what they really want. And where you sometimes have to step back, so that somebody else can do what they want.
>
> So basically, what she described was consensus building. And I think it was a very important moment for the whole group to hear her and listen to that you cannot always have it your way. You have to negotiate and figure it out, find the shared understanding. That's basically what she meant with “it's like family”: family is finding a shared understanding…

Some of what we see here is reminiscent of other narratives we have seen earlier. Early on in the process, a participant offers an opinion that brings up an emotional response in other participants. The role of the facilitator throughout is to be the intermediary who is listening to each contribution; this is similar in structure, to the kind of structured listening format in some schools of family therapy. Although the context of a *Bürgerrat* is clearly *not* intended as therapy, this listening format allows the resolution to the conflict to emerge from the participants themselves as their understanding of one another grows.

In addition, we see another aspect of the facilitator role here: the powerful impact of the simple invitation to “tell me more.” Although in a different context the older woman’s contribution could have been overlooked or dismissed, here she is offered an opportunity to say more about the personal meaning of her expression. The result is a moment that the facilitator perceives as having significance for the whole group:

> *And your sense as a facilitator, of how this affected the rest of the group, right then?*
>
> She said what they could experience; she pointed it out. Basically, it was in the room: like, if we all stick to our [own] plan, and don't listen to each other, we will write a lot of flip charts, but nothing is going to happen. There was this frustration, and then that's where she came in, with that…
>
> I think it brought the quality of "we're together in this" into the whole group. Whereas before, it was more like "you said this, I say that; if you don't change, I don't change". And then, all of a sudden, it could go to the next level. In that way, it was I think important.
>
> *And what are some of the signs that the group is ready to go to next level?*
>
> I think sometimes it's a silence... it can be silence.
>
> And then out of that silence, there can be new ideas that can emerge… like out of the blue. All of a sudden, somebody says something, and it comes up, whatever was in the room, but nobody [had] said yet.
>
> *Any thoughts about what that was, in this particular case? what somebody said into that silence, what new ideas came up, if you remember? If not, it's okay.*
>
> No, I don't know. I think it was this situation of understanding, why their work is important. Or why them being there is important, but I'm sorry, I don't remember in detail.
>
> *It's ok… so you feel like somehow, this shifted the understanding, of why them being there is important, a sense of importance about the work that they're doing?*
>
> I think it's easier to speak from the heart, when before you might have had fear or the concept of being vulnerable. After a situation or a moment like that, it seems all of a sudden easier to speak from the heart, like *deeply* from the heart…

This is the third instance of silence emerging as the marker of a meaningful moment. Given some of the early comments that indicated how closely facilitators observe participants' gestures and facial expressions, I had initially expected that it might be something visual (and we shall see further on some mention of visual phenomena). Yet while I was not expecting this response, it was also familiar and recognizable; as a practitioner, I've also had the experience of facilitating groups where something deeply meaningful happens, and a moment of shared stillness emerges.

> *So then, things continued... and you mentioned that at some point, the older businessman said something. Was there anything you remember, between when this woman said this, and then, when the man spoke?*
>
> Well, he just admitted that his view on women, or mothers, changed... he said, "I had to learn that women also want to develop their skills and wants and go after their needs." And I think for him, that was a giant leap. I could feel that for him, a whole new universe opened up. It's like his view on women shifted completely… it was something you could tell, that he loosened up a little bit, and could see the world a little bit differently. He had some spark in his eyes, like glitter, I don't know how you say that in English, "*Glänzen in den Augen*", like, "something new is starting, and I'm part of it," I had that kind of feeling.
>
> *Anything notable about where you all ended up?*
>
> I remember that they came up with a concept for a Wisdom Council; they didn't know about the *Bürgerrat* at all before. But they just designed a poster where they said, "This needs to happen; we need to have a group like this." And then they just designed, how whatever this group comes up with has to be fed back to the politicians and the political system, and how to control politics in the future. And so, they came up with a really nice design.
>
> They painted that, after the DF was over. It was basically something one guy said, he just said, "I have it! I have it all in my mind. It just came together!" And he just painted it and everybody else said, "Ja, this is exactly what we need!" To all of them, it was clear: "Ja, this is what the system needs."
>
> *So basically, they were describing a process like what they had just been in, so they're kind of endorsing it, saying "we need more of it"?*
>
> But also, the part that would come afterwards. And it was stunningly close to what they do in Vorarlberg. Like, REALLY close.

> *So, they wanted the results to actually be connected with what's happening, in terms of the administration and the implementation?*
>
> Yes, yes. At the earlier stage, the first morning theme was, "Politicians need to be controlled, we need an expert. We need experts and ministers, not politicians. They're all corrupt." [During] the whole "purge" phase[59], controlling politicians was an issue, for a while. So that was a shift over those two days, from "Control politicians; install experts instead of politicians, because they're all corrupt," to that other model that they designed.
>
> *And what would you say is the connection or the impact between what this woman offered of "politics as family" and what they came up with?*
>
> I think she described the kind of quality that we're looking for in the Wisdom Council. And drew from her experience, from her life experience, and made this accessible to the whole group.

This last question, about the impact of the significant moment on the policy outcomes of the group, is something I asked after most of the *Bürgerrat* narratives. In the third narrative described earlier, the answer was "not much"; the facilitator imagined that the group would have arrived at similar policy outcomes regardless of the meaningful experience of personal growth that took place in the group. In contrast, in this narrative, we see a closer connection between the meaningful moment and the policy recommendations that are the outcomes of the council.

Facilitators' Insights: Reflections on Their Own Narratives

Toward the end of each individual interview, after having explored a particular council in depth through the lens of a meaningful moment, I asked the narrator to metaphorically take a step back from their own story. Then I invited them to consider what insights they themselves might draw from the story they had just told. These could be insights about human beings, how

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[59] The "purge" phase indicatets the first part of the process, when people are "emptying out" by offering their initial ideas and initial solutions with which they came into the room, and being heard by the facilitator (Rough, 2002).

human beings behave in groups, and/or insights about their own role as facilitators. For this section, I have compiled some of their responses.

The first response below reminded me of Yankelovich's emphasis on ***public dialogue as a way for people to "work through" their positions*** with regard to an issue – as well as ***the need to balance expertise with lived experience*** and vice versa. In her interview, Andrea Binder-Zehetner offered,

> I would say that the people, they know a *lot*; they have a lot of experience, and they need a place or a space where they can talk about their experiences. And they can change, or not change but amend, their experiences. They say, "Aha, somebody is saying that... Okay, ja, true, [that] may be what is..." so then they can work on it; it's a work in progress. So, work in progress, in this one and a half days.
>
> It's important to have the connection with the experts afterwards, for example in the *BürgerCafé*. I won't ever say that the people are the experts, the *new* experts, [that] they know everything, only because it's their experience. But to work with this material, that's the valuable thing, and to bring it into connection then afterwards, with the experts, so that it can go together, can fit together.

As evidenced throughout, the ecosystem of civic renewal in Austria includes both the DF-based *Bürgerräte* and the Art of Hosting (AoH) practices; most of the practitioners I interviewed are highly accomplished in both. Several facilitators brought up AoH spontaneously in their interviews, even when responding to questions about what insights they drew from their story of a particularly meaningful *Bürgerrat* moment. This felt natural and appropriate to me, as in my experience, these practices can be very complementary. For example, Robert Pakleppa reflected on ***the significance of preparing a hospitable setting*** for connection among participants:

> We really care --in Art of Hosting, it's quite common, but in other surroundings, it's not-- that there is a good coffee, and that people have the time to say hello to each other, and to connect and socialize in mindful hosted breaks. These things are so, so, so much part of the outcome, and so much part of how the group can develop, because they're the moments where people really connect. There is a real chance for a really personal connection between

> people and then the outcome is completely different, because people really meet as friends or as colleagues, not only as part of group. And this turns the group completely different.

The Art of Hosting tradition also brings an emphasis on “hosting yourself first.” This means ***doing one’s own inner work to cultivate one’s ability to be fully present***, as a preparation for doing work with groups. Robert speaks to this inner preparation as he continues:

> I think the way people behave in groups, and a group as itself, as an organism that develops, is very much connected to your own vision of what could come out. So, for me, if I go into a group and I really feel this makes sense, what we're doing here, then I can also look at people who normally are a struggle for me, because I'm a person as well, and I of course react to different personalities in different ways.
>
> And I can then see that behind every cynicism, behind every fighting, behind every criticism, whatever, there is a serious necessity, which has to be understood, which I have to understand. And then if I go into groups, then groups can react and people in groups can react in a human way. Then they can show themselves, [out from] behind this cynicism.
>
> For myself, I have to have a team and reflecting group, which helps me to find a way into that role, because I'm not as reflective every day. I come out from my own family experiences, and better or not as good days. So, to really step in, especially in conflicts, where with *Bürgerräte* and Dynamic Facilitation, we are really working with hard topics, where people really suffer, have maybe suffered for years…
>
> To really step into this, with your own biggest, biggest possibility of being human, and not just “being a professional"… I'm *not* just doing a job and running an evening. It’s my time as well, so be serious with me. I give you all my time, and my whole concentration, so that's what I ask from you. And that shapes the group as well.

Part of facilitators’ discipline and dedication involves ***the challenge of holding back***, of allowing people to feel their own impatience at times, to work through their frustrations. As Martina Eisendle reminds us,

> The power of the group must stay in the group, and not by me. It's the way and the process of the group. And I am always here, *um die gruppe zu dienen*, to serve it… I'm the butler of the group, always *im meinen dienende halting*…in a serving attitude, an attitude of service.

> The *Ergebniss*, the results, the outcomes, must be the solution from the group. Not the solution from someone from outside of the group, like politicians or the experts. It's not so easy, because you are with your body, and with your brain, in the front of the group. And then, you must leave the *Verantwortung*, the responsibility, in the group; the outcomes, the topics, the answers of the questions, must be a product of the group and not from me… And you have to have respect, for the solutions of the group.

In the next response, Michael Lederer emphasizes how this respect is embodied in the Dynamic Facilitator method: ***drawing out and welcoming participants' initial perspectives***. As each person is deeply heard, and the differences among them are welcomed, this serves to create a sense of commonality in the group:

> What is really helpful is this part of Dynamic Facilitation -- Jim names it "purging"[60]. Put out everything that the people carry with them in their imaginary backpack, to make them ready for a kind of transformation. When you as a facilitator can purge the different participants, and when everybody is kind of empty, it gets to a different level and everybody's ready to explore something together. And that's a very important thing; to get into a deep listening, to get to really listen to other points of views, and other perspectives, and so they can learn and change their own point of view.
>
> These kinds of settings help people to explore, "What do we have in common? What is it, that has us sitting in the same boat?" For me, that's really the first step to get into action together…to understand, not just on a rational level, but to really FEEL it, in the heart and in the stomach, to say, "okay, that's OUR common challenge: let's face it together, let's find solutions."

Florian Sturm offered a related insight on the facilitator's role of ***welcoming multiple realities***:

> As a facilitator, the role is only to help them accept that there is more than one reality out there and that you can be right without the others being wrong. Something like this… And that there are solutions out there, which don't necessarily have to be bad for you, if they are good for others. Something like that. So, there's a way how your needs can be met, and everybody else's needs can also be met.
>
> And [as the facilitator] the only thing you have to do for that, is to appreciate everybody, and just help them listen. And that's not such a hard task, actually. It's just a challenge to get into this state, in the beginning. Sometimes people get impatient…

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[60] Rough, 2002, p.89.

Several facilitators' insights expanded upon the ***role of emotions***, a frequent theme among the narratives of memorable council moments. Kristina Henry reflected on the positive impact that the willingness to share one's feelings can have in a group context, ***creating a greater sense of connection among participants*** – and also, how simple it can be, to welcome the emotional dimension of a story as a facilitator:

> As soon as it gets emotional, you have a deeper understanding of what's happening […] you are getting further, and people are getting further, there's a development happening. There's something happening, when you realize the emotional aspect of the story. It's easier for people to be empathetic, when emotions are being told.
>
> And that means for me, as a facilitator, I would ask for the emotions. I ask them, "So, and how was that? And what would you feel?" And I do ask that, realizing that this kind of story has a larger impact than just short sentences and theoretical background. I try to ask for the stories, by saying, "Tell me more." Doesn't need much more, actually.

In turn, Ines Omann commented on the ***self-limiting nature of painful emotions***, and how being ***met with kindness and presence*** allows difficult feelings to naturally resolve:

> Fear, or uneasy feelings can go away if you're allowed to talk about them, to really mention what's going on. And if you have a safe space, which of course we try to give in DF, where nobody is shouting at you, or even if there is aggression, there are facilitators supporting you, holding [space for] you, and giving you the room to talk. Even if feelings come up, if you cry or whatever, it is okay. And then human beings […] have the feeling that it is okay. There is somebody [who is] not judging you, [who is] taking care that you are not judged. That you can talk about maybe your deepest shadows or fears or whatever is in there. And this is a relief.

At the same time, the purpose of the Bürgerräte is not emotion for emotion's sake; rather the lens includes the whole human experience, of which emotions are clearly a part. Yet the main focus remains on the search for workable ways forward, to the shared challenges of our lives together as human beings. And in the face of those challenges, what is most needed is ***facilitating a creative response***, as is emphasized by Markus Goetsch:

> I see a certain quality in this method we use, the Dynamic Facilitation, and that is, that it can be used for deliberation, absolutely, and deliberative processes, but when you look at it closer, it's actually facilitating creativity. So, it's eliciting creativity, the kind of creativity that probably everyone has in in them. But sometimes we don't allow ourselves to let it out, or we forgot about it, that we have it in us.
>
> And then, everybody puts something in, from their experience, from their visions… and, all of a sudden, everything is there, and everything can serve, even concerns, and frustration, and wounds that people tell about, it can become a resource for the whole group. And that's so nice... that's so nice about this process.
>
> It's like you're fostering a little plant, the sprout that just came out. And if you ask too much, it might go back, it might not be able to make it. But if you just give support and connect on this empathy level, then this little sprout can turn into a plant and become a nice new point of view, or a solution, or... and it's created in the moment, in the very moment.

From the facilitators' narratives, it seems that the frequency with which this shared co-creative journey is realized through the *Bürgerrat* process may have contributed to the spread of this civic innovation process in Austria and Germany.

In the next section, I will offer a meta-level graphic summary of the findings so far, as well as some comments on their interrelationships.

Meta-level Harvest of Themes from Interviews and Focus Group

Figure 3

Harvest from the interviews and from the reflection group

The work

What are we learning about this kind of public work, and how it is done…

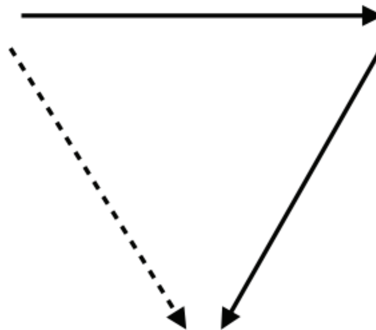
both "on-stage", through in-the-room facilitation,

as well as "off-stage", through pre-work and post-work?

The effects, from FPV…

How does this work affect participants, both personally and interpersonally?

How does it affect Council outcomes, and through that, public policy outcomes?



The movement

How and where is this work growing, developing, and spreading?

In the above graphic (Fig. 3) we see a high-level summary of what has emerged so far. The content of the interviews could be seen as speaking to three meta-questions: how is this work done, what are its effects from the facilitators' point of view (FPV), and how has it been spreading?[61] We began to learn about the first two, in the facilitators' responses to the question about joys and challenges; the facilitator narratives spoke to all three meta-questions. Earlier, I postponed presenting material about the off-stage aspect of facilitators' work, some of which showed up as responses to the question about the challenges of this work; we will see more on that aspect, shortly – through an interview excerpt as well as in the focus group findings.

Now for the relationship between the three meta-questions. To begin with, it's fairly self-evident that the councils' effects on participants, as well as their policy outcomes, are likely to contribute to the growth and spread in the use of these councils. Less obvious initially, there may also a direct contribution between "the work" itself, especially the pre-work, and the growth of this movement; this is represented by the dotted arrow. We have seen one example of this in the story about the Special Committee in Salzburg (a committee of parliamentarians), and how their experiential learning about councils led to a growing involvement in this work, even before the Council had taken place.

In another instance from the interviews, not included in the material seen above, Robert Pakleppa described a planning meeting he facilitated that included a group of seven elected officials and public administrators, representing the various political parties in the town government. They were doing some preliminary planning for the town's first Bürgerrat, which was being held to address a troublesome local issue. During that interview, after Robert shared a

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[61] For more on how I arrived at these questions, see p. 77.

detailed narrative about a moment in that collaborative design process, I asked how this moment had affected the outcomes of the council. Robert then informed me that the council itself had not yet happened; it had been postponed due to the coronavirus. However, these seven representatives had already begun to bond as a group across party lines, as a result of the planning process. In addition, this group of seven had been so engaged by the planning process that they persuaded the larger group of 30 members of the local town government and administration to allocate a budget for a new internal position for 6 months. This new office would be staffed by a person whose charge would be to help de-escalate public conflicts.

These are two significant instances in the interviews where the pre-work with elected representatives and public administrators in preparation for a council, appeared to have a direct effect on the growth and spread of the work of civic co-creation – even *before* the subsequent outcomes of the councils. Along these lines, in the field of organization development, a frequent saying among practitioners is that "everything is already an intervention" starting from the very first contact with a client (for a detailed account, see Block, 1981). From this perspective, it makes sense that the pre-work with the elected officials and public administrators is *already* influencing the spread of the work.

At the same time, I have heard for some time now a consistent message from the participatory design practitioners who organize and facilitate the *Bürgerräte*. (This includes, but is not limited to, those who participated in this study.) The message is that what public participation professionals do "in the room," with the mini-public, is the easy part. In contrast, the relationship-building that is involved in the pre-work, and that helps ensure that there is follow-up afterward (especially in the original consultative design), can be the most challenging

(as well as most impactful) aspect of the work. We will see this in greater depth when we go to the focus group reflections; but first, here are some of the responses from the interviews.

Challenges and Opportunities of Working with Politicians

Here is a response from Robert Pakleppa, a veteran facilitator with many years of experience:

> Most challenging for me, is something in the larger processes, which most of the people don't see, but they feel it afterwards. And then actually, the whole work is nonsense. If you don't think from the beginning to the harvest at the end, then how do we cope with the harvest? If after there has been a very good "idea" from the *Bürgerrat*, if the politicians and administrators don't have a structure to work with that, and are not prepared for, what do we do with the results? And for me, that's the biggest struggle then, because people are not being taken seriously. And then how do we really rebuild a structure and help people who have been invited to this process, to carry on with their energy of wanting to be part of something and wanting to help? And this is for me, very frustrating.
>
> And that's something that as a designer, as a core designer of a process, is one of the things which makes a safe place. It's not only the facilitation, but making the whole process a safe place for everybody. As we have done this kind of facilitating for quite a long time, I can really say that it turns up the quality of your facilitation if the whole process is safe. If you know that they will take the outcomes seriously, then you can open up the room and facilitate in a completely different way: you can invite people to a *much* deeper level of understanding and solving problems.
>
> So, for me as a facilitator, there are all these different layers you always have to think of. It's not only being very precise at facilitating the moment itself, but also really coping with all these structures and helping people, the mayors and ministerial officers and everybody involved, to understand where we are, and what their role is, and what they should do, so that this is really worth all the energy we are giving to it.

What follows next is an excerpt from the interview with Michael Lederer, a high-level public administrator. Michael's level of experience is extensive; he estimates having organized or administered 25-30 councils, 10 of which he facilitated before taking on his current position as director. This following section was in response to the second opening question of, "What do you find most challenging about this work?"

The most challenging thing, I guess, is to get the political decision makers into this process... into a deeper level of understanding what is going on in these kinds of processes.

Years ago, during the presentation of the results -- we call it the *BürgerCafé*, in the World-Café presentation format -- they [public administrators and politicians] often said that the results are not very innovative or new for them. They said things like, "We are already doing these kinds of ideas that they [the Council members] brought up". And we often said, "Okay, that's one point of view you can take."

But on the other hand, you can reflect, "Why are they coming up with these ideas, when everything like this already exists? So, they don't know about it?" They were not involved before, obviously, and so there is a lot of potential to learn from each other, and to not have this separation of, on the one side, the informed politicians and decision makers, and on the other side, the uninformed citizens.

We have to build bridges between these two worlds. And for me, the Wisdom Councils or Citizen Councils are exactly for that, to make policy-making a common process, and not just a thing that some elected people are in charge of. We are all in charge of doing policy-making.

Yes, making it a common process, not just a thing that the elected officials are doing on their own somewhere else, and that the people don't even know what they're doing, and then they come up with the same ideas because they don't even know. That's fascinating...

And obviously, you've been doing this for a long time, and you've been seeing what works with regards to getting these political decision makers into the process. And, you may be still encountering some obstacles... so I'm curious about, what is underneath that?

This year 2021 is an anniversary; we are doing 10 years now, state-wide Wisdom Councils in direct connection with our governor and the government of Vorarlberg. And over these 10 years of practicing Citizen Councils on different levels, we had a lot of learning moments. This kind of process is never finished. In developing it and adapting it for a political system. we have learned that the preparation of the process within the administration is as important as the Citizen Council itself.

So, finding the right question for the Citizen Council, and with this question or frame, giving the participants the container for the conversation. Another aspect is finding good possibilities to work with the results.

> In 2019, we did a statewide Wisdom Council on the issue of the future of agriculture. It was initiated by the citizens themselves; with 1,000 signatures. It's possible to initiate a state-wide Wisdom Council, and they did this, on the agricultural issue. The timing was really good, in that we had statewide elections for new government.
>
> At first, I was skeptical about this timing because we didn't want the process, or the Citizen Council itself, to get caught up in the campaigns. But afterwards, it turned out that it was really great, because there was a big attention to the process. And the Member of Parliament who is in charge for agriculture attended. We did three *BürgerCafés*, three presentation formats, in the different regions of Vorarlberg, and he attended all three, [each time for] the whole two and a half hours.
>
> This never happened before, that a member of the government attended *all* presentation formats, for the whole duration. And that was very powerful, because he got really a good impression of the quality of conversation we have in these processes. During one of these presentation formats, he came to me and said, "Wow, now I learned that I don't have to be afraid of the citizens anymore!" So, this was perfect... That's exactly what we like, that the politicians experience during these processes.
>
> Back to the timing of the process: the Citizen Council was before the election, the presentation was shortly after the elections, and the new government was preparing their program for the next five years. And so, they could grab the results of the Citizen Council and say, "Okay, let's do it in our program, for the next five years." And there are ten or eleven pages in their program about agriculture, and six or seven of them are the results of the Wisdom Council. What is written down in the program is being evaluated every year, so now we have ongoing monitoring of the results of Wisdom Council. That's really powerful.
>
> These are the kind of learnings that we have to search for, during the preparation of the process. We say it in the Art of Hosting language, the harvesting container to put the results in afterward, is a really important thing we do before. Often, we are not very deep into the issue, because we are not in charge for agriculture. But within the administration, there is a unit and we go to them and talk and say, "Hey, there is a Citizen Council coming up. […] How can this process be valuable for you?" So that's the kind of learning we had in the last few years, that this is really powerful for the impact of Citizen Councils.

This story is a strong example of what deliberative theorists call "forum-system linkages." I'd like to highlight here that this example happened 8 years after the *Büro* had begun to host annual state-wide councils; before that, they had spent a prior 6 years gaining experience

with local and regional councils, such as the one we heard about in the first narrative. There has been a long, slow process of focusing on learning, gaining experience, and building relationships, that has brought the *Büro* to this point.

With this, we now turn to some highlights from the focus group reflections.

Focus Group Reflections

The focus group was held during the pilot study phase of my project, and included three participants and a back-up translator. All three of the participants had already concluded an interview with me. After an initial check-in, I asked participants in the focus group to share any highlights they wished to offer from their individual interviews. Then I lightly posed the question of how to leverage the effects of the *Bürgerräte*, while also inviting them to take the conversation where they wished. As it turned out, the bulk of the topics had to do with the challenges of organizing *Bürgerräte*, and I will shortly be sharing some illustrative quotes from these main themes. But first, I want to note that *both* interviews and focus group reflections included "in the room" and "beyond the room" themes.

In the individual interviews, even though the bulk of the material that emerged had to do with the facilitator's work in the room, some beyond the room insights also emerged. We just saw one example of the key linkage concern above; overall, these kinds of responses addressed both the value as well as the challenges of working with project sponsors and developing solid commitments to implement at least some of the recommendations of the council. Conversely, in the focus group reflections, the main themes that emerged had to do with the work involved in planning the councils; nonetheless, some of the material that came up touched on the in-the-room role of the facilitator and its effects on participants. Because the insights on the effects of the

facilitator came up toward the beginning of the focus group, I will start by exploring those comments. [62]

One facilitator offered the topic of **human dignity** as an orienting frame that continued to reverberate throughout the ensuing conversation:

> the practice of dignity.... being worthy of respect and honor. And if somebody has a sense of being heard and being respected, that raises the sense of dignity. Dignity is based on that you are worthy; and that changes a lot, when people experience that and feel dignified.

Another contribution was **"*allparteilichkeit*" (multipartiality)** and its relevance for the practice of facilitation:

> Obviously, I have an opinion, and I can never really be neutral. But I can be interested in, and empathic to everybody, and curious about what their perspectives are. First thing is, as facilitator, I can be this. The second thing is, I can accompany participants to getting there. Participants come with their own perspective and their own views and plans and solutions. It starts with giving them the space to express that, and feel valued and appreciated. And then, they can open up further.

Another facilitator described the experience of **empathy**:

> There is a moment where for me as a facilitator, it feels possible to invite a group into […] a room where it's *their* room, and we just help them to be safe in that room. And then we go fluidly with what emerges, but still, we help them to step out of their normal perspectives, and get into empathy with other perspectives, with other lives, even with the perspectives of people who are not in the room. The core of that, for me as a facilitator, is that I believe in it, that it's possible.

Another described the process of **empathic reflection as a "resonance rock":**

> Seeing a big rock while walking in the forest; thinking "that rock is me, in my role as a facilitator". I can offer this "resonance rock" where individual people can reflect themselves. When she or he speaks, I write it down and so they hear their own sound back.
> And the whole group, they can hear the different sounds, and suddenly, they can hear the music. And this is for me, the moment of emergence, when the group can hear the music.

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[62] In this part, I will not be using names, as in the Dynamic Facilitation process, we do not focus on who said what. As facilitator, I only attach names to contributions when there is an action item for which someone will be taking responsibility. In that spirit, I will proceed here along similar lines.

After this initial exploration of the facilitator's role in the room, comments shifted to exploring **the work involved in organizing these councils**. Early on, a participant described the process of engaging with a potential client as follows:

> This starts actually in the moment where we connect with someone who has a question, "Can you help me?" when there is a beginning of a personal connection between a human being and another human being, which wants to develop, and to solve something for a higher good, for a common good.
>
> When it's possible in this moment, to be very, very clear, then from this point we can really invite others, as a host, to be part of something they haven't been part of before. We can open a room where we invite others, and then we sense together, the emerging field of a better future. The table cloth has been put out and, and now people can take their seat and enjoy a moment of being human, a moment of humanity.

As noted earlier, in the practice of OD, everything, including the initial contact, can be *already* an intervention. I hear resonances of that perspective in the above comment.

As the conversation evolved, the topic of **nuances of random selection** emerged when a story was shared about the importance of "*aufsuchen desverfahren,*" meaning following up with people personally, as was done in the Irish Citizens' Assembly to ensure the attendance of the members of the original random sample. At the same time, the facilitators expressed concerns about how much time and expense should be invested in that process:

> There's a lot of challenges with that, because the organizers just have their address, and don't have a phone number, because that's not in the central register. So you have to go through half the country, and even then, are not sure you will meet them. And so there's a lot of practical questions about that.
>
> 30 or 40 years ago, you would invite the public and you knew who would come, because always the same people came. There was no perceived need then to get other people in the room. Now, we are having this approach that we really need to get even the ones where it's hardest, even if you have to get translation, or even have if you have to pay them, because some people can't afford to come, they can't go away from their job for one day even, or for an evening. Or they have to care for somebody. It's an interesting time in democracy, where

> we are really trying to get everybody on board […] this is a good thing, and at the same time, we need to be pragmatic about this.

Notwithstanding the effort involved in doing so, strong support was voiced for **expanding and ensuring inclusion**:

> One question to take seriously, is how to reach people who don't speak our language, or maybe are not able to speak at all... who are not able to go from one place to another as easily as we do... who are not able to follow zoom. How to reach people who are too young for anybody to take them seriously, or who are too old to understand the complexity of the next generations' problems, who are maybe not used to thinking in these layers, or who just think they're not worth being part of this, that they're not meant to be part of it. If the processes work well, then we really have a very big diversity. And that is something to really work hard on, because if we are honest, there have been times where we just reached middle-aged or upper-aged people who have the time or the education. We should be better there. And that's something we have to change.
>
> In the old habit of ruling and leading people, lots of those who would have said "yes" to such an invitation, were not asked. "Well, we don't have to ask them, they won't say yes." Or, "We don't have to ask them, because they don't know anything that could be helpful." Or, "We don't have to ask them, because they're not old enough." Or, or, or, or… So there is a big gap. And we could fill that gap. It's not about getting *everybody*, but it's about opening up our mind and *inviting* everybody, and then, seeing what happens.[63]

The conversation returned to the theme of **working with project sponsors**, via a comment about how this can be a **key aspect for ensuring diversity among participants**:

> If we're working in political processes and political change processes, the first step is to build a field of trust with those who are in power or in powerful positions. We have to open their minds to understand that just because they are elected, they are not necessarily in a position to really understand deeply *all* the different perspectives they are actually responsible for. So that's where it starts, inviting those who are in charge to understand that they *need* diversity, that diversity is actually one of the keys you have to have, to open up this sort of transformation.

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[63] In the context in which this comment was offered, "seeing what happens" did not imply a lack of support for intensive follow-up or knocking on doors; rather, the point was to emphasize how the mindset needs to expand, to consider that everyone may be potentially interested, rather than unintentionally excluding people based on unexamined assumptions about who might or might not respond to an invitation.

> With that, the follow-up question could be, if you understood that diversity is one of the keys, then *who* is really needed to solve this problem, not only from the viewpoint of the next four or five, six years, but from the perspective of the next generation of those who are nowadays 20, and who will stay on this planet as adults for another 40 to 60 years, and who will have to live with our decisions from today? And if you have an answer to *that*, then you might start then, to invite a field…

Along these lines, two different **benefits of inclusion** were mentioned -- one was gaining a systems view, while another was building trust with a broader constituency:

> One dimension where this intention to have diversity and to have these many different perspectives is important for the result, is in terms of, "what's the outcome? What are people agreeing on? What are the solutions?" If you have a certain diversity, then a lot of perspectives are taken into account. While you never have every perspective in the room, at some point, you get a systems view. Then there's this other dimension, adding to earlier comments about building trust. This is where you say, "We want them in the process, we want to broaden the base, we want to create trust, we want to create community."

This conversation about inclusion led to an interesting **example of a successful adaptation of the design of a *Bürgerrat* to ensure inclusion**, in this case, the inclusion of farmers:

> Looking at the experience of the *Bürgerrat* on the Future of Agriculture, in preparing for this, in designing how the process will be, we thought we want to find a method or a form that the farmers can be part of. Because farmers won't come one and a half days to a *Bürgerrat*.
>
> And so. we held workshops before, regional workshops where they might know each other, and have the same issues [as others] in the region. We also thought, what's a good time for them to come? It can start at eight o'clock at the night, till 11, because they are not done with their work before eight o'clock.
>
> And then we made little videos from these workshops, and we showed the videos in the *Bürgerrat*. And so, [at] the start of the *Bürgerrat* [there] was the videos from the different workshops from the farmers. And the people heard what the farmers and *farmerinnen* said. And so maybe it needs little steps, to give people the experience of how they can be involved. Maybe different parts and different little steps, so people can have the experience.

Another facilitator offered a different yet complementary perspective:

> It was also about building trust with this group of farmers. It was not only about bringing their voice to the *Bürgerrat.* It was also, “We will show you how the process works, and we will ask ***you***, first, because you're the professionals.” And then we bring those two worlds of insight together, to create something that is really grounded, that you can put your whole weight on it, that can stand the test of time.
>
> The design of that process really showed that *Bürgerrat* is not a one-way street. The design of the process has to really take care of the different layers: not only the ability to participate, but also the expertise people have as professionals […] and also, the layers of politicians who are involved, and how can they connect this to their decision-making processes. So, we really have to *not* "do a *Bürgerrat*", but we have to look for a topic, then select the group that has to be invited so the outcomes can be durable. And *then* we go for, how do we design it.

At this point, the conversation evolved from the topic of inclusion, to that of **how the *Bürgerrat* needs to be adapted to different circumstances**, and how important that is:

> In the field of *Bürgerräte*, we have a kind of “roll out”... there's more and more *Bürgerräte* going on. So, people start to say, “What is the right way to do it? What is the core of *Bürgerrat?* And you can't touch [change] the core.” For some of us, "the core" is we want to help people change the world through the way of collaboration. And without saying, “it only works this way.” We have to open fields where people really feel asked, in a way that they can participate.

Indeed, throughout the interviews, as well as in this focus group reflection, I have noticed the enormous amount of experimentation and adaptation that is taking place. While an in-depth study of these variations is beyond the scope of this project, Appendix C contains an organized summary of the various examples of innovation that surfaced.

Another theme that emerged in the focus group reflections was that of **planning for post-council implementation**. Already in the individual interviews, several facilitators had mentioned how demoralizing it can be for everyone involved, when a group works hard only to find that their recommendations have been ignored. Facilitators had spoken about this as a lack of respect

for participants and for their time. As a way of preventing this, **the resonance group**[64] was described in the focus group as a "field that needs to be cultivated from the start":

> A process is never a process, it's always planning a harvesting. So, we're farmers, thinking of what is it we want to harvest, because we want to feed ourselves, and feed others. It's really important to not forget this step in planning a process, to make a field of trust with the people who are in power. We call this the "Resonance Group", and at the beginning, we think about who are the people who will be making decisions AFTER the process, people who are in politics or in different positions of power.
>
> Working with the Resonance Group before the process and after the process is connected with respecting the dignity of every person who will take time to be a part. The Resonance Group needs to think about what they will learn from these persons who they invite, and what will they make with the results afterward. And this is important, to think about this before the process starts.

At one point, the conversation segued onto the topic of **communicating the transformative potential of this work**:

> In one project, we have been thinking about how to communicate the transformative potential of these processes. we really want to communicate what happens, when people go into these processes. It's such a big shift in people, to start thinking about themselves as possible contributors to democracy or to regional solutions. When people first come in, maybe they come as observers, maybe they come as stakeholders who have a certain stake... and then, when they practice putting the overall good in the center, the community in the center, that does something to them.
>
> When we think about our current crisis of democracy -- people are frustrated with it, people are left out by it – this [the Council process] is something that can restore some sort of motivation, some sort of optimism, and some sort of willingness to contribute. This changes the perspective one has about oneself, while other processes in democracy are not pulling you in. They leave you out -- you give your vote, and then you go again.

At the same time, concerns surfaced around **not attempting to "prove" anything**:

> Some of us have a concern when someone is trying to show or prove that a process is transformative and powerful. Instead, we prefer to think the other way around: what is the

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[64] The Resonance Group, also known as the Responders Group, is one of the highly significant additions that the *Büro für Zukunftsfragen* made to the initial Wisdom Council model when they developed the *Bürgerrat* or Citizens' Council format. (Zubizarreta, Paice, and Cuffy, 2020; Hellrigl & Lederer, 2014.)

> [underlying] need for the process? It's not that it's not effective, but we don't want to prove anything. We're just serving an overall need. If there's a need for something, this could be the process in service for it. But we don't know from the start. Some of us think if there's a real need from the people in power, or from the different stakeholders, that creates a different foundational ground.

The subject became more complexified as someone introduced the notion that sponsors might ***not*** be seeking a transformative process. This, in turn, led into a consideration of the **potential value to sponsors, of the outcomes of a Bürgerrat**:

> Some of us want to communicate the transformative quality of the Bürgerrat. Yet the perspective of some of the people in power on the Bürgerrat, is ***not*** that it is a transformative experience and that's why we want to have it, but that it can bring good results.
>
> In our planning group, someone said, "We're not a deliberative process. We're not in the head [in contrast to the heart]; we are aiming for a transformative process." We don't want to raise expectations that the outcomes of this process will be like some expert wrote them. That's not what we're doing. The outcomes of the process might not even be that impressive to somebody looking at them, because they can be general. Someone may say, "Okay, this is not really new." Of course the outcomes *can* be spectacular, but sometimes they're not. It's what happens in the group [that is so meaningful.]

In exploring the value of participatory work for sponsors, someone mentioned how helpful it can be to have **the presence of a real need**, even an extreme one, as a context for making good use of participatory processes:

> In an interview, an administrator who spoke about the effectiveness of these Civic Councils, said that they are usually effective when there's a real need or desperation. In many cases, many politicians don't need or want help, because they [already] have something in mind, or their party has something in mind. Yet in the Council about the refugee situation...there, the politicians had some desperation, because if they did nothing, they would get in trouble. If they did something, they might get in trouble. So, they needed some kind of overall guideline. And that is what the Civic Council gave them. And that was a help for them, because they needed help.

The reference here is to the 2015 Council on Refugees and Asylum Seekers that took place in Vorarlberg[65]; earlier in this paper, we saw a narrative about another crisis situation that led to the first *Bürgerrat* in Salzburg.

In this focus group, the conversation continued on to explore, through a humorous anecdote, **other possible benefits for elected officials and public administrators** from the *Bürgerräte*:

> Some people have said, you can tell a politician that it's a good thing to do a *Bürgerrat*, because then then the politician can blame the participants of the *Bürgerrat* for the solutions. A colleague who works a lot with mayors, said that after a *Bürgerrat* on a sensitive topic, he talked to the mayor on the phone. The mayor said, "I went to the pub after the *Bürgerrat*, and it was so relaxing. Nobody started a fight with me because of the decision that was taken, since it was not me who made the decision!"
>
> Some of us find this a bit funny or absurd: since we live in a democracy, the people should in fact be the ones making the decision. But it is a valid argument, that this can be relaxing for the politicians.

Toward the end of our time together, the conversation shifted into the theme of **acknowledging the humanity of people in positions of power**:

> Something that made a real impression, in connection with the Council on land [use]. There was a person responsible for the economic end of things and another responsible for the land planning. [Before the Council] these two different administrators had not sat at the same table before with an open mind, to discuss the different thinking they had about what's important.
>
> It was surprising for some of us to learn that they had *not* done this before. They had been caught in an attitude of fighting, and had not focused together on creating good results. It's easy to think, "Ah, this is a political person in their world, they know what they are doing..." but they are also human, like me, and like all of us.

This perspective was then expanded on by another facilitator, in a way that we could describe as **"inclusion directed upwards"**:

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[65] In two of the interviews in my study, facilitators chose to tell about a moment from this council. I have not chosen to expand on those narratives in this project, as that would be a project all of its own, which would need to include more than two different perspectives to offer a more in-depth study.

> Sometimes, in our bubble of democracy builders, there is a kind of an arrogance. “Whom are we working with?” And, “Oh no, they're not prepared yet!”. It's like us asking others, “You are not inviting those people?” but we are not inviting *them*.
>
> [As facilitators] we are *not* neutral in the way we behave in the world, and reflect on the world, and have ideas on how to help shape the world in a good way, a way which lasts for generations...but we have to be finding neutrality toward those we want to open the room with, and especially toward those who are in power. And to find their human core part and then design together with them, a process in which they can stand.
>
> There is a teaching by Phil Cass, from Art of Hosting: if you work with people in power, you have to do your homework first. And your homework is to find out who is the human being behind the man or woman in power.

As mentioned earlier, to the degree that the pre-work for the *Bürgerräte* involves a facilitative attitude – the same attitude that the facilitators offer within the council – this pre-work too can make a direct contribution to the spread of this process, in addition to the outcomes of the councils.

Overall, I found that the focus group results mirrored Cooper and Smith’s findings (2012) with regard to professional public practitioners in Britain and Germany. These researchers concluded that the practitioners they interviewed were “part of an impressive community of practice” with strong commitments to democratic principles, who were concerned with and thoughtful about the various challenges involved in their work (p. 35). I would fully agree with their assessment, with regard to both the practitioners who participated in this focus group, as well as the practitioners with whom I conducted one-on-one interviews.

In the next and final chapter, I synthesize some of the implications of what we have seen thus far, and connect it with current theoretical discourses in the field.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE RELEVANCE OF THESE FINDINGS

In this closing chapter, I distill some of what we might learn from the practical experiments of the *Bürgerräte* in Austria that can contribute to the theory and practice of organizing and facilitating democratic innovations. From my findings -- the facilitator responses, facilitator narratives, and focus group reflections presented in the previous chapter -- I explore three main areas of implications.

The first is the question of, what does good facilitation look like? What is the facilitator's role in the room during these councils, and how does this relate to previous understandings of the facilitator's role within the literature on deliberative democracy? In addition to following Asenbaum (2016) in looking at these facilitators' role through the lens of "welcoming testimony", I explore how *Bürgerrat* facilitators understand and enact listening and empathy in their work, and what this implies for theory, research, and practice.

The second set of implications relates to the effects of these councils on participants and on group outcomes. How do these facilitators' narratives confirm and expand upon current literature in the field with regard to deliberative outcomes, and where do they differ? With regard to "consensus," I explore how forum design can affect the relationship between diversity of perspectives and ease of arriving at a convergence on outcomes. I also look at the role of policy outcomes, and begin to explore some of the reasons why their implementation can matter so much to facilitators and process designers.

The third set of implications is more general; it has to do with the diffusion and spread of these and other democratic innovations. How might a greater awareness and appreciation of the various roles of facilitators and process designers contribute to the revitalization of democracy? Here I explore the issue of power, both its negative as well as its positive aspects, to consider

how a greater understanding, appreciation, and visibility of the collaborative power of the facilitator role can support the spread and development of this work. I begin by following Follett (1925b/2013) in looking at two kinds of power, power-over and power-with; this distinction, along with others, can help us better understand the role of facilitators within mini-publics. I also look at how we might more fully acknowledge and welcome the work of facilitation and participatory process professionals in exploring, negotiating, and co-designing contexts for civic engagement, participatory governance, and collaborative learning and growth. A related yet even broader question is, how might we develop wide-spread societal literacy with regard to the knowledge, practice, dispositions, and mindsets involved in hosting, group facilitation, and participatory process design?

What Does "Good Facilitation" Look Like?

In Chapter 2, I described Mansbridge et al.'s (2006) research on facilitator norms, which pointed to a curious tension: facilitators were holding themselves and others accountable for evoking a high-quality group conversation, while at the same time, upholding the norm that they should be nearly invisible in order to satisfy the norms of free flow of ideas, equality, and group control. Blong's 2008 study of NIF forums pointed out the tradeoffs she found between the "goods" that could arise from more active forms of facilitation (in this case, more deliberative conversations), and on the other hand, the value of having more self-regulated interactions in a group (similarly, Dillard, 2013). Blong's larger point was that if we don't attend to the role of the facilitator and its impacts, we won't be able to make conscious design choices regarding these potential tradeoffs.

How do the *Bürgerräte* experiences gathered here relate to these earlier findings? In this approach, the facilitator's role is quite active. Especially during the early stages of the process,

the facilitator asks participants to direct their comments toward the facilitator and then reflects back what they have heard, checking for accuracy. From personal experience, I know that practitioners trained in other facilitation modalities can easily dismiss this approach at first glance as too facilitator-centric, and may deem that this is not dialogue, since the participants are not talking directly to one another. Yet such snap judgments often overlook what is made possible by this format, where facilitators can experience themselves as the "resonance rock" that helps each person to be deeply heard. Also, this format allows participants to continually provide feedback as to whether or not they have been heard to their satisfaction.

What might it mean to "facilitate testimony"? In his 2016 article, Asenbaum describes the participation format of the two *Bürgerräte* he observed as having strong similarities with Lynn Sander's notion of "testimony," where "one person shares his or her views and experiences with the group without fear of being interrupted, while the group listens" (p. 5). Asenbaum notes that the effect of having participants address their testimony to the moderator is that "the moderators' concentrated attention and appreciation is mirrored by the group," and thus "respectful and constructive conduct is quickly established within the group" (p. 5). The two councils where Asenbaum made these observations were held in a region "marked by social tensions and a generational conflict," as a concentration camp had been situated there. Many older people there "want to leave the past behind," while in contrast, younger people "have developed a critical response to past Nazi influence and want to continue to engage with it" (p. 4). Thus, it is particularly significant when Asenbaum notes that "despite the controversial issue at hand, an open, tolerant, and productive atmosphere was created" (pp. 4-5).[66]

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[66] For more information about the specific councils that Asenbaum observed, see https://participedia.net/case/4297

Recently in the highly polarized United States, we have seen some striking examples of a format where having participants direct their contributions toward the facilitator or moderator serves to create productive spaces for conversation across differences. I am referring to the success of the Braver Angels debate format, where participants are asked to speak directly to the moderator, rather than to one another, in order to explore polarized issues constructively.[67] In the Braver Angels design, unlike the *Bürgerräte*, the moderator does *not* offer empathic listening reflections to participants; yet the directionality of comments, from participants to the facilitator or moderator, is similar. Greater familiarity with these kinds of innovations could lead to experimentation in the US with *Bürgerrat*-style formats for mini-publics, especially in situations where participants are exploring particularly divisive issues.

Here it may help to make a distinction between "active facilitation" and "directive facilitation." As we have seen in the previous chapter's narratives, in the *Bürgerräte* (and in Dynamic Facilitation more generally) the facilitator is highly active with regard to listening, reflecting back accurately to check for understanding, welcoming divergent perspectives into the room, and "protecting" people with unpopular perspectives[68]. At the same time, this facilitation approach is also highly non-directive and designed to foster emergence; for example, other than explicitly welcoming divergent perspectives, the facilitator does *not* appear to need to pose the kinds of questions often used in other contexts to promote a more deliberative conversation.

How does testimony shape discourse? Asenbaum (2016) points out that testimony-giving does *not* imply "that participants simply narrate their stories, oblivious to what has been

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[67] See https://braverangels.org/what-we-do/debates/

[68] Asenbaum includes a powerful quote from the moderator of the councils he observed, where she describes how she does this embodied work of "protecting" people with unpopular perspectives, in a manner similar to what we saw earlier in the third facilitator narrative of this research study. Two different facilitators, in two different councils, are describing a similar process.

said by others before." Instead, participants "pick up arguments of others, express consent or dissent, and propose alternative views" (p. 5), even while directing their comments to the facilitator. This is consonant with other work that has been done on narrative, where researchers have found that participants often use storytelling to express divergent perspectives (Ellis, 2014; Black, 2008; Black, 2013.) Unlike Ryfe's earlier findings (2006) when analyzing National Issues Forum videotapes, the active facilitation of the Bürgerräte does *not* discourage storytelling; these two formats are very different. As we have seen, in addition to welcoming storytelling, the Bürgerrat format also creates a space where extremely divergent perspectives are welcome.

In his 2002 study of 16 U.S. organizations that promote public deliberation, Ryfe pointed out that "there is no such thing as one form or format of good discourse"; instead, "different kinds of contexts demand different kinds of conversations" (p. 369). We could build on that to say that *different kinds of conversations demand different kinds of facilitation*. Ryfe also mentioned a variety of sources that the organizations he studied drew from to develop their methods: family therapy, conflict resolution, the legal system, humanities education, and political philosophy (p. 361). The structure of dialogue-through-an-intermediary that Asenbaum (2016) describes as "testimony" is often utilized in family therapy (Freedman, 2014) and conflict resolution (Friedman & Himmelstein, 2008). It often includes a significant amount of "active listening" or reflecting back by the mediator or facilitator.

However, Asenbaum (2016) does *not* comment on the role of reflection (or saying back) in what he observed. This is understandable, since although such reflection is a pervasive feature in this format, it's also easy to miss. After all, the facilitator is not really "saying" anything; he or she is only reflecting back whatever the participant has said. Why would that be important? For those without a background in counseling or mediation, this kind of intervention might be easily

overlooked. Yet it can be one of the most significant things that a facilitator does, so this is what I will turn to next.

What is made possible when facilitators are "active witnesses"? Within the *Bürgerrat*, the facilitator's role as active listener allows them to model good listening as they listen in depth to each person in turn, reflecting back each contribution and checking for understanding. This contrasts with group situations where the attempt to get participants to listen to one another is done primarily through the setting of group norms. Instead, the highly active listening role of the facilitator creates a context where attitudes are "caught, not taught" and where the participants have the opportunity to "overhear" one another's testimony. Yet while the facilitator is repeatedly engaging in reflective listening, we saw in the previous chapter that these facilitators do *not* tend to conceptualize their reflecting back as setting an example nor as modeling good listening. Rather, they describe their role as one of being genuinely curious about what participants are saying. For example, we heard from one facilitator that "you have to be like a fascinated child" when listening to others. Another facilitator mentioned how listening deeply to participants, helps those participants in turn be better able to listen to others: "It's not possible to be open, or to hear other opinions, when you are not feeling allowed to share your own." Facilitators described their role as listeners, as helping participants "purge" or empty themselves out, so they could have room for new thoughts: "When you as a facilitator can purge the different participants, and when everybody is kind of empty, it gets to a different level and everybody's ready to explore something together." And they also describe their listening practice as an opportunity to offer empathy to each participant; and in so doing, awaken participants' own empathy, as exemplified in the following insight:

> Obviously, I have a opinion, and I can never really be neutral. But I can be interested in, and empathic to everybody, and curious about what their perspectives are. First thing is, as

> facilitator, I can be this. The second thing is, I can accompany participants to getting there. Participants come with their own perspective and their own views and plans and solutions. It starts with giving them the space to express that, and feel valued and appreciated. And then, they can open up further. (see p. 166 above)

Clearly, in these facilitators' practice, listening and empathy are deeply connected. In contrast, some recent deliberative theory posits a conflict between listening and empathy (Scudder, 2020) as the result of a definition of empathy which involves "imagining" or "guessing" how others might be feeling (Morrell, 2010). Although Scudder and Morrell disagree strongly on the *value* of empathy, they share a similar *definition* of empathy, as an *intra*personal ability or quality that lives within an individual person, rather than as something enacted *between* people. This allows a potentially antagonistic opposition between listening and empathy to arise. Scudder's concern is that an emphasis on empathy could preclude the need to listen, as we might choose to simply guess or imagine how others might be feeling and use that as a justification for continuing to live inside our own heads instead of listening to one another. In contrast to Morrell's focus on empathy, Scudder focuses on listening.

This line of reasoning, logical enough once the underlying assumption is understood, initially appears perplexing to those of us trained in communicative and relational practices stemming from Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology. There, "empathy" is enacted collaboratively and intimately connected with listening through the communicative practice of listening-and-reflecting-back to check our understanding [69]. This *inter*-personal approach to empathy actively involves two people, in contrast to the *intra*-personal approach described earlier. Barrett-Lennard (1981) uses the terms "facilitative relational empathy" or a cyclical

[69] Empathy historian Susan Lanzoni (2018) offers a valuable description of the work of Otto Rank and Jessie Taft and their influence on Carl Rogers (pp. 126-143); see also Kirshenbaum (1979) and Barret-Lennard (1998).

model of empathy (pp. 93-95) to describe this relational understanding of empathy. An essential element here is an interactive approach to listening that includes regularly reflecting back to the speaker, in a tentative and respectful manner, what we have just heard. The intention of reflecting is to discover whether we are developing an accurate understanding of the speaker's contribution. As part of doing so, we explicitly invite the other person to correct us and/or to expand as needed, until he or she deems that they have been fully heard (see also Rogers, 1980a, pp. 141-145; Barrett-Lennard, 1998/2007, pp. 93-96; Irving & Dickson, 2004, pp. 216-281; Topornycky & Golparian, 2016).

While this relational approach to empathy is especially useful for understanding the work of a facilitator or mediator, it is helpful to recognize that empathy is not a settled concept. Although research on empathy has been proliferating, significant differences persist in the way it is defined. Judith A. Hall and Rachel Schwartz (2019) explore these differences in their recent in-depth analysis of the literature, where they noted that different authors include different combinations of perspective-taking, emotion-sharing, emotion recognition, pro-social concern, and compassionate behavior in their various definitions of empathy. They write, "For some authors, empathy is a superordinate construct requiring the activation and coordination of multiple processes, while for others 'empathy' is defined and assessed not as the culmination of an interpersonal process but in terms of individual ability" (p. 233). With regard to approaches that focus on empathy as an interpersonal process, they write that in both the counseling and the medical field, "there are well-developed traditions of studying empathy in terms of the verbal behavior of the therapist or physician" (p. 236).[70]

[70] For an in-depth review of empathy as a complex construct in the context of therapy, see Gibbons (2011).

Within democratic theory, the interpersonal approach to empathic listening is consonant with Dobson's description of "apopathic listening," where one is "opening the self to the other and holding one's categories in abeyance" (Stanton & Warner, as quoted in Dobson, 2014, p. 70) in a way that includes empathic intentions and attitudes as well as "reflection and feedback" (Dobson, 2014, pp. 50-51, 71.) This apopathic listening approach differs from the listening approach enjoined by Scudder (2020), one that while serious, attentive, and humble, is also avowedly untainted by empathy.

Just as Scudder's "performative listening" does *not* include empathy, Morrell's (2010) definition of empathy does *not* include listening. In his otherwise in-depth exploration of empathy and feeling as key for democracy and deliberation, Morrell chooses to define empathy by building on social psychologist Mark H. Davis' model; as a result, his construct is a completely internal affective and cognitive process which does *not* include any relational or communicative aspect to it, even though Morrell writes that he follows Rogers in describing empathy as "a process, not a state" (p. 62). [71]

While puzzling, Morrell's (2010) reluctance to include communicative empathy in his otherwise comprehensive work could be related to historical circumstances. In Carl Rogers' lifetime, the popularity of his own work led to some unintended consequences; Rogers came to lament the misuse and abuse that arose from the commodification of his empathic reflection

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[71] To be fair, Morrell (2010) mentions Iris Young's concern that promoting empathy could lead to an increase in projection (an earlier concern similar to Scudder's), and points out that the deliberative context itself could be an intrinsic remedy for this concern, given that it offers the opportunity for "an attentive, communicative exchange among citizens" (p. 167). However, that remedy is construed as *external* to his conception of empathy, which does *not* explicitly include anything like an interpersonal process. Instead, Morrell defines empathy as a purely internal process, which can lead to interpersonal outcomes such as helping, aggression, or social behavior, all of which are *external* to empathy (p. 64, emphasis added.) For an explicit discussion of intrapersonal vs. interpersonal constructs of empathy in the context of working with health professionals (primarily nurses and doctors), see Irving & Dickson (2004).

practice (Rogers, 1980a, p. 139; see also Irving & Dickson, 2004, p.216). In a political context, Dobson (2014) makes the point that "helping people feel heard" can be manipulative whenever there is no good faith effort to do something about what they are saying (pp. 65-66). Like any tool, the skill of "facilitative relational empathy" (Barrett-Lennard, 1981, p. 93-95), often called "active listening" by mediators (Susskind, as quoted in Mansbridge & Latura, 2016, p. 45) needs to be used in an ethical manner.

The powerfully effective practice of active listening continues to be taught widely today. It goes by a number of different names within a variety of fields– not just within the professions of counseling and psychotherapy, but also within mediation and conflict de-escalation. This communicative skill is taught to physicians as a way of developing and communicating greater empathy for patients (Buffington et al., 2016; Jagosh et al., 2011; Robertson, 2005.) While not immune to commodification, sophisticated practitioners and researchers understand that intention and integrity are key to its responsible use; successful practice involves cultivating a disposition as much as learning a skill (see especially Jagosh et al., 2011) and includes many nuances (Robertson, 2005.)

Within a mediation context, Friedman and Himmelstein (2008) call this practice "looping." Having a mediator reflect back what a participant has said, then checking for accuracy, is taught as a foundational skill in their broader, comprehensive approach (pp. 68-76). As mentioned above, Susskind calls it "active listening" and describes it as essential to any mediation process (as quoted in Mansbridge & Latura, 2016, p. 45).[72] At the same time, although

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[72] Reflective listening is currently taught to laypeople as part of Rosenberg's Non-Violent Communication (for a compilation of research on NVC, see Little, 2020), Gendlin's (1984) Focusing Partnership, and Rutsch's Empathy Circle movement (Kakai, 2021; Nowak, 2020). Both Rosenberg and Gendlin were students of Carl Rogers; Gendlin also served for a time as Rogers' research director; Rutsch is enormously inspired by Rogers' work.

there is wide-spread use of reflective listening in the mediation field, it's only fair to acknowledge that different views on empathy are also present there. Some narrative mediation theorist-practitioners are skeptical of the concept of "empathy" as being too psychological, and propose instead that the value of reflective listening may be that it allows people to hear their *own* selves more deeply (Cobb, 2013, p. 184.)

Still, regardless of what the modes of action might be, the facilitator narratives in this research affirm the value of facilitative relational empathy (also known as communicative empathy, or reflective listening, or active listening, or looping) as a key part of the facilitator's role within the *Bürgerräte*. This is one area where deliberative democracy could expand its theories of listening and of empathy based on findings from practice, and where further research could be done. The *Bürgerräte* as "natural experiments" could be an opportunity for case studies seeking to explore how the facilitator's active and inclusive reflective listening response toward each participant affects perspective-taking among participants. In 1980, Rogers pointed to research from that era showing that "an empathic way of being can be learned from empathic persons […] and learned most rapidly in an empathic climate" (Rogers, 1980a, p.150); this claim could be investigated again, in a present-day context.

With regard to practice, there are already initiatives afoot in the UK to enhance public engagement practitioners' ability to work with conflict and to learn more from mediators about how to do so (personal communication, Andy Paice); thus, the circumstances may already be developing for a potential spread of the practice of facilitative relational empathy / looping / reflective listening within the fields of public engagement and democratic innovations.

So then, what does "good facilitation" look like? As Dillard (2013) wrote, it would be helpful for future researchers to realize that "facilitation is not a single stylistic category" (p.

231); facilitators differ with regard to their skills and training in various facilitation methodologies. Most professional facilitators have a varied repertoire, and thus their work can look differently depending upon the given context and format. These facilitator narratives can serve to inform and expand our sense of what good facilitation can look like, as well as expand our sense of possible formats for mini-publics.

What Happens in Civic Contexts When People Feel Deeply Heard?

The outcomes of the *Bürgerräte*, as described by the facilitators in this study, echo ones that have already been documented in research on other kinds of facilitated mini-publics. *Bürgerräte* facilitators both report and show through their narratives that participants build community with one another, that participants' sense of agency and efficacy grows and develops, that participants' faith in one another and in the possibilities of working together are strengthened, and that participants come to have more empathy for the work of elected officials and public administrators[73]. As these findings have been frequently reported before in the literature, it is promising to see that these councils' "testimony-based" approach appears similarly generative in these areas. Using Scudder's terms (2020), we could hypothesize that professional facilitation of various kinds serves to create the conditions for uptake or fair consideration of others' perspectives in mini-publics, thus leading to many of the benefits of community, personal agency, capacity to cooperate, and understanding of public officials.

One paradoxical outcome of a facilitated environment of respect and openness, where each person's perspective is invited, welcomed, and heard, is that there can often be significant shifts in participants' initial perspectives. This, too, is an outcome that has been frequently documented in mini-publics, particularly in the case of Deliberative Polling, where participants

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[73] Lee (2015) repeatedly cites this last outcome as evidence of public engagement being a tool for neo-liberal hegemony. I consider her concerns more fully later on in this chapter.

fill out pre- and post-assessments to measure the shift in their political positions with regard to the issue at hand. To my knowledge, this kind of research has not been done with *Bürgerräte*. It could be valuable to conduct. Nonetheless, the facilitator narratives reveal their perceptions of significant changes in participants' mindsets and attitudes as a result of these councils.

Mansbridge et al. (2010) define shifts as "transformative" when participants adopt "to some degree the perspective of another… [take] the other's interest as their own," or develop a deepened commitment to a larger good, whether a sense of justice or the larger community; sometimes this can even create shifts in a participant's sense of identity (pp. 78-79.) While my research was not designed to measure the frequency of these occurrences, my findings suggest that within the *Bürgerräte*, transformative change at the level of identity appears to be to a "not-so-rare occurrence" instead of the "relatively rare occurrence" held by Mansbridge et al. (p. 79); further research seems warranted.

Forester (1999) has written extensively about transformative learning as an outcome of participatory practices and deliberative democratic inquiry, when "participatory rituals of telling and listening to stories can work transformatively […] to transform identities, agendas, and perceptions of value in the world" (p. 137.) He points out that doing so requires balance, as too much structure, predictability, and predetermination can shut down learning, while not enough structure will lead to confusion and failure; instead, he finds through his practitioner narratives in the field of multiple-stakeholder mediation, that the "structured unpredictability of ritualized storytelling" enables collaboration and innovation (pp. 141-142). Writing about a search conference[74], Forester describes how "ritual encounters allow participants to listen and learn, to

[74] This is a group format often used in the organization development and community development fields. There are various related types; the original was the Emery search conference model (Emery & Purser, 1996) later adapted and modified by Weisbord and Janoff to create Future Search (1995). A description of a search conference adapted to an indigenous context and carried out in an indigenous manner is offered by Moore and Doxtater (2020).

watch and see, to feel and identify concerns they were not clear about earlier" (p. 146). As a result, this "ritually organized complexity" serves to draw out concerns and interests, "allows the consideration of relevant questions before narrowing participants' attention to any overriding one" (pp. 148-149), and offers a "public and articulated acknowledgment of conflicting and pressing values" (p. 150). All of these descriptions resonate with what we have seen in the Citizens' Councils.

What does convergence on outcomes look like? A particularly relevant implication of my own findings for the field of democratic innovations is that they can help us to re-think the relationships between diversity of perspectives and ease of convergence. Both the normative literature on mini-publics and the literature critical of deliberative theory, have often posited a trade-off between the goal of "consensus" and the goal of welcoming diversity; indeed, one of the purposes of Asenbaum's (2016) research on these Councils, is to address this trade-off by exploring how "the advantages of consensus [can] be preserved while avoiding its oppressive tendencies?" (p. 2).

Before delving further into this issue, I want to begin with troubling the term "consensus" a bit, for several reasons. First, the word has multiple meanings. Within the world of facilitation and mediation, it can be used to refer to a particular *method* of arriving at convergence (for example, the "Quaker consensus" process is distinct from a sociocratic "consent" process[75]); at the same time, it can be used to refer to the unanimity of the final *outcome*. While I realize that in political theory the term "consensus" usually refers to the outcome of unanimity instead of to a particular decision-making process[76], I will use the term "convergence" to refer to a unanimous

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[75] On how these two processes differ, see for example, https://www.sociocracyforall.org/sociocracy/

[76] After I had written this section, I came across Friberg-Fernros et al.'s (2019) thorough review of "four generations of deliberative theorizing on consensus" in their substantive introduction to a recent symposium on the subject. In a

outcome and "consensus" to describe one of the ways that a group might achieve unanimity. Here I follow Kadlec and Friedman (2007), although I use the term "convergence" instead of "confluence." They too eschew the term consensus to describe a point of arrival, introducing instead the term confluence to describe the *outcome* of a process whereby diverse perspectives are gathered in order to bring "alternative viewpoints to bear on a common problem." They describe *confluence*, the outcome of this diversity-seeking approach, as the identification and pursuit of "new, unforeseen and unexpected directions for working together" and "working agreements for moving forward on concrete public problems" (pp. 13-15.) This kind of outcome is exactly is what I mean by convergence.

Similarly to how Kadlec and Friedman describe their process, within the *Bürgerräte* eliciting diverse perspectives and generating an abundance of creative options is a key part of the group journey. The culmination of this journey is convergence on a final set of policy recommendations by the end of each *Bürgerrat*. Below, I will describe the details of the process of arriving at that convergence in fuller detail. Here I want to emphasize that while the final outcomes of the council's work are "only" recommendations, they have a strong likelihood of being implemented based on the prework that has been done as part of setting up the council. No one can be asked to "sign a blank check," and the outcomes of the *Bürgerräte* are unpredictable. Yet a significant amount of orientation of the project sponsors takes place in advance. The organizers remind the sponsors of the value of having as much follow-through as possible with regard to the future recommendations, and the risk of generating greater civic mistrust if this is not done well. In addition, part of the organizers' pre-work is building rapport with potential

future work, I hope to address more fully the implications for existing theory of the Bürgerräte's 15 years of natural experiments in this area.

members of the Responders Group, the committee that will be in charge of meeting monthly to track what happens to the recommendations as they move through the maze of the bureaucracy.

How does convergence emerge in Citizens' Councils? Now for a closer look at how convergence is reached. While several facilitator narratives in Chapter 4 have mentioned these features, I want to synthesize and expand upon these steps here for the sake of greater clarity. My intention is to address the concern expressed by some theorists that "alternative forms of communication may not transcend collective choice problems: people tell stories or testify, and then what?" (Bächtiger et al, 2010, p. 49). Thus, while I focus on mini-public *outcomes* in this section, and specifically on the outcome of a strong convergence on a set of policy recommendations that arises from full consideration of diverse perspectives, I will need to first expand a bit more on the facilitator's role in creating the conditions for this to occur, and in facilitating convergence toward the end of the process.

The first of these conditions is the abundance of creative options generated by design. In the *Bürgerräte*, participants are *not* asked to choose among pre-selected options; instead, one of the main roles of the facilitator is to welcome and draw out a wide variety of solutions, including the ones that participants first walk in the door with (and which they share in detail during the initial purge phase) as well as any and all new solutions that participants come up with throughout the process. Unlike solutions proposed early on, later solution ideas are informed by having heard others' perspectives, as well as having heard others' concerns about the already-proposed solutions. Nonetheless, all contributions are treated equally, in the sense of being given a warm welcome, reflected back for accuracy, and written up on a long and continually growing list that ends up filling multiple sheets of chart paper.

At the same time, divergence (including any concerns about others' proposed solutions) is also actively welcomed throughout and followed up with solution-focused questions that invite contributors to elaborate upon their *own* proposals. For example, when a participant offers a concern about another participant's solution, the facilitator welcomes it, reflects it back to clarify, and records it on the "concerns" chart – and *then*, asks that participant what alternative solution they themselves would like to propose. As a result, by the time that the facilitators ask the group to begin creating a set of final statements (usually around ¾ of the way through the process) the charts already hold a large number of proposals for the given policy area – it is typical to have 40 to 60 items on the "solutions" chart, and it could easily be more.

At that point, the facilitator invites participants to suggest which of the existing proposals they feel are most likely to elicit convergence from the group. The facilitator then invites the group to suggest any adjustments needed to those statements, in order to come up with several statements that all can support. Usually by then, finding areas of convergence is not particularly difficult, given that the bulk of the challenging work has already been done: differences have been welcomed and honored throughout, with multiple specific instances of divergent perspectives having been given a fair hearing. Although Asenbaum (2016) does not offer this level of detail on the process of convergence, he describes it in more general terms, as his having observed a "dialectical relationship between the individual level at which dissent and individuality remain, and a collective level at which consensus is produced" (p. 7).

Convergence and creative integration. As a complement to the lens that Asenbaum offers, another lens can also help us understand this aspect of the *Bürgerrat*; and that is, as a democratic and creative journey designed to arrive at win-win solutions through a process of integration as originally described by Mary Parker Follett (1918/1998). In the last twenty years,

Follet's views on integration have been brought to bear on deliberative democratic theory by a small handful of authors (Mansbridge, 1998; Mansbridge et al, 2010; Mansbridge & Latura, 2016; Wright, 2019); within the field of public administration, the applications of Follett's thought to integrative governance have been explored in depth by Stout and Love (2019).[77]

With regard to the *Bürgerräte*, we can understand much of what takes place there as repeated instances of creative integration; win-win outcomes arrived at through a combination of story-telling, offering testimony, and facilitator-enhanced listening. As participants work through presenting conflicts and explore their "mutual and conflicting interests," they often end up "expanding the borders of the problem or introducing new perspectives," -- as Mansbridge et al. (2010) describe the work of integration (p. 71; see also Mansbridge, 1998, pp. xxii-xxiv; Stout 2019, pp. 519-528). One example often shared in contemporary mediation contexts to illustrate "win-win" solutions is the metaphor of two people fighting over the last orange, before realizing that one of them wants the juice while the other wants the peel. In her day, Follett offered concrete examples from her own experience of what integrative outcomes can look like (see Wright 2019, pp. 8-9); key to her definition of integration, the solution is usually something that had not been apparent earlier. This is one reason Follett (1925a) so deeply valued diversity of perspectives or "difference", as that is what makes the new possible (Mansbridge, 1999, p. xxxv; Wright, 2019).

Yet this kind of substantive synergy between "me" (what each of us wants initially) and "we" (a solution that delights us both) can be hard to imagine in a culture of domination based on zero-sum, win-lose relationships where our experience is often shaped by "me *or* we." Within

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[77] Follett was a visionary political theorist, social worker, community organizer, and organizational consultant whose work, although well-known in her time, is only recently being recovered. For an edited volume of current applications to the fields of governance, conflict resolution, community development, and management, see Stout (2019).

the field of organization development, Herbert A. Shepard termed these zero-sum relationships "coercion-compromise systems," and called the culturally prevalent mindset of mutual threat and mistrust to which they give rise, "primary mentality." Shepard (1965) then described "secondary mentality" as the awareness, gained from experience, that needs can be met through mutuality and collaboration, leading to "collaboration-consensus systems" where each individual benefits from the existence of the group, and in turn, the group benefits from the full diversity of the individuals who comprise it (see also White, 1969.) At the same time, although Shepard's distinction between a "me *or* we" worldview and a "me *and* we" worldview is crucial, the labels of "primary" and "secondary" are historically contingent and in hindsight, can seem ironic. From the perspective of decolonization, we might consider that what has been called secondary mentality here (me *and* we) is actually primary, in the sense of being much more aligned with a relational and indigenous perspective of the world. In contrast, what Shepard referred to as primary is actually the secondary effect of a culture of world domination based on fear, competition and enforced scarcity. Only our current early socialization, and thus the need to unlearn it, makes it now appear to be primary.[78]

Within the facilitator interviews, we heard indications of the crucial role of this shift in perspective, as when Florian Sturm described his role as, "to help them accept that there is more than one reality out there, and that you can be right without the others being wrong […] So there's a way how your needs can be met, and everybody else's needs can also be met. And the only thing you have to do for that, is to appreciate everybody, and just help them listen" (p. 156).

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[78] In other contexts, this distinction between two worldviews has been termed the "infinite game" in contrast to the more prevalent "finite game" (Carse, 1986). Given the existential crises we are currently facing in the world today, Carse's terminology seems particularly apt.

Initially, it is the facilitator who embodies this possibility, though they do not necessarily talk about it nor attempt to convince participants of this. Instead, as over time, participants experience the value of listening to one another in depth via the structure of testimony, their innate human creativity and puzzle-solving tendencies lead them to generate new options that attempt to address all of the various needs and interests that have surfaced. Thus, group participants have the opportunity to discover this "me *and* we" perspective in action.

In this way, within a well-facilitated context, diversity of perspectives becomes an asset rather than a liability. In the narratives, we saw repeated examples of the value that social differences and initially conflicting perspectives can bring to a group process (Young, 2000), such as in the first narrative where Ines Omann was initially quite startled by the emergence of the "elephant in the room" in the form of drug abuse within a picturesque rural valley, or in the third narrative where Annemarie Felder invites in a very different perspective on education. These instances resonate with Fung's experience that a high level of conflict *within a facilitated context,* means that "participants will invest more of their psychic energy and resources into the process and so make it more thorough and creative" (Fung, 2003, p. 345, as cited in Mansbridge et al., 2010, p. 73, f 25). Yet although conflict *can* be enormously generative for the creative process, the role of the facilitator is to ensure that this will be the case by inviting participants to explore conflicting perspectives in depth *without* engaging in unproductive interpersonal confrontation (Escobar, 2019, p.187). We have seen a particularly active form of this function of the facilitator role in the *Bürgerräte*, where the facilitator actively welcomes strong divergence while also protecting the participant who is bringing a particularly unpopular perspective.

In her critical review of Mutz's book on the tension between participation and deliberation, Hélène Landemore (2013) writes, "It may well be that a reason that so many people

are not interested in participating in politics is not that they fear disagreement per se but that they dislike the way partisan politics forces them to deal with those who disagree in an uncivil way" (p. 222). Thus, one of the many benefits of mini-publics within a larger deliberative system is not that they seek to replace the existing institutions of representative democracy, but that they demonstrate the possibility of working with conflicting perspectives in constructive and meaningful ways. One recurrent finding from facilitated mini-publics is that participants enjoy experiencing these new modes of relating with one another, or "new interaction orders" in Goffman's terms (Escobar as quoted in Molinengo et al., 2021, p. 3); the facilitator responses and narratives from this project show that this is equally true of the Vorarlberg Bürgerräte.[79]

These *Bürgerräte* narratives illustrate how some of the creative tensions that have sometimes been seen as inescapable tradeoffs --such as between diversity and consensus as addressed by Asenbaum (2016), or between the processes of will formation and generating consensus as described by Fung (2003, pp. 344-345) -- can be seen in a more contingent manner as, at least partly, outgrowths of our cultural assumptions and conditioned ways of being, rather than foundational truths. As such, they can be influenced, at least in part, by how group process is designed. As Mansbridge (2003) writes with regard to the tension between self-interest and the common good, "The normative, psychological, and institutional trick lies in finding ways to move in both, not necessarily contradictory, directions at once"; the possibility suggested here is that *how* we design conversational forums can make this trick much more difficult, or

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[79] As we saw in one of the narratives, mini-public participants are not the only ones who enjoy the experience of being in the creative environment generated by Dynamic Facilitation; the public administrators and elected officials in the Special Committee in Salzburg actively requested this kind of support for the work they were doing after having the initial opportunity to experience it.

conversely, much more likely.[80] For example, it is usually much more difficult to arrive at shared agreements in situations where there is a predetermined number of options, or where participants' attempts to persuade or influence one another with the force of the better argument turn into "argument as battle," than in a context that is lightly structured as an extended creative process of welcoming and exploring differences, generating new possibilities, and developing shared understandings (Wright, 2019). A similar constructive dynamic can occur with the skillful use of "talking circles" (Forester & Kahane, 2009, 215-220; Forester, 2009, pp. 29-33).

As a result of his experiential observations of two *Bürgerräte*, Asenbaum (2016) suggests that what is known in deliberative democratic theory as "consensus" can be achieved in a productive manner that avoids conformity and groupthink, through the use of discursive modes that "allow individuals to participate in a 'we' while maintaining their personal and dissenting views" (p.7). As quoted earlier, Asenbaum found that "Telling stories, giving testimony, and listening facilitate inclusion in a contingent 'we'," while allowing participants to meet their needs for "both belonging and maintaining independence" (p.8). This analysis resonates with the facilitator narratives in Chapter 4, as well as with my own previous experiences with the Dynamic Facilitation process, where the format is designed to support the emergence of areas of convergence that are richly informed by the diversity of perspectives present in the group. The findings from the facilitators' narratives presented in this project, Asenbaum's (2016) observations of the *Bürgerräte,* and Wright's (2019) theorizing on Follett's applications to deliberative democracy, can all lead us to a productive pause, in which we can consider Fung's (2003) recommendation that we not allow our common aims to "obscure the rich and multidimensional variation" among different forms of public engagement and participatory

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[80] With regard to moving beyond dualities in practice contexts, Barry Johnson's polarity theory (2014) offers an extremely helpful construct and format for exploration.

processes. Given his recommendation that "the design characteristics of mini-publics should be deliberate choices rather than taken-for-granted habits" (p. 365), I hope that one of the results of this research will be to expand our range of possible design choices for mini-publics.[81]

At the same time, I want to introduce a caveat: some theorists have called attention to the "consensus paradox" – the concern that arriving at agreement in one situation may make it less likely for productive disagreement to arise in future occasions (Friberg-Fernros & Schaffer, 2014). While life tends to not bear out this conclusion overall,[82] in some situations precedent can become "hardened" and what was a creative response at one point becomes an ossified relic. Along these lines, mediation scholar-practitioner Sara Cobb (2013) warns about how the constructive depolarization that occurs during an integrative mediation process and allows for a new creative win-win solution to emerge, can eventually grow stale over time, becoming a new "established truth" around which people begin to re-polarize in a non-productive manner (p. 66).

To avoid the "risks of conformism, argumentative stagnation, and confirmation bias" as the potential after-effects of consensus, Freiberg-Fernros et al. (2019) mention the need for "institutional design" (p. 5). Here I want to offer two thoughts. First, these risks are prevalent in group process more generally, not just as the possible after-effects of consensus. These risks are

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[81]For more on the impact of design choices on mini-publics, see Harris (2019); also Weiksner et al. (2014, pp. 269-272).

[82]In a talk at the London School of Economics, Mary Parker Follett (1949/1987) stated a bit hyperbolically: "The most important thing to remember about unity is — that there is no such thing. There is only unifying. You cannot get unity and expect it to last a day–or five minutes" (p. 76). Some years earlier, in *The New State,* she had written, "The surge of life sweeps through the given similarity, the common ground, and breaks it up into a thousand differences. This tumultuous, irresistible flow of life is our existence: the unity, the common, is but for an instant, it flows on to new differings which adjust themselves anew in fuller more varied, richer synthesis. The moment when similarity achieves itself as a composite of working, seething forces, it throws out its myriad new differings. The torrent flows into a pool, works, ferments, and then rushes forth until all is again gathered into the new pool of its own unifying." She continues, "This is the process of evolution. Social progress is to be sure coadapting, but coadapting means always that the fresh unity becomes the pole of a fresh difference leading to again new unities which lead to broader and broader fields of activity" (Follett, 1918/1998, p. 35).

one of the reasons why facilitators are a key element of institutional design. The narratives in Chapter 4 have shown what one such design can look like, as facilitators fulfill this essential function of welcoming and drawing out diversity. Second, to elaborate on Cobb's warning, these processes must be iterative. Part of the reason that the Vorarlberg *Bürgerrat* model was included in the 2020 OECD short-list of democratic innovations is that its regular use on a state-wide level has been written into the Vorarlberg State Constitution. And part of what makes iteration possible is the cost-effectiveness of this relatively small and agile process. Although hugely expensive, large-scale initiatives have their place, especially at a national level, they are also significantly more resource-intensive. We need democratic innovations that are appropriate for different levels of scale.

What happens to the convergences on policy outcomes? Although the facilitators interviewed here make it clear that to them the convergence on policy outcomes is not the only significant outcome of the *Bürgerräte*, they are also equally clear that they do not want participants to feel that their time has been wasted. A failure to implement at least some of the council's recommendations would imply that participants' hard work had not been honored. Thus, in their role as process designers and organizers, these professionals work hard to create a strong likelihood that the policy outcomes of the councils will be implemented. Although institutionalizing the *Bürgerräte* in the states of Vorarlberg and Salzburg is a significant accomplishment, practitioners were clear that in each specific instance, intention, effort, and relationship-building needs to take place to ensure follow-through, and that plans for such follow-through must be attended to from the beginning of the process. As mentioned in several of the facilitator narratives, as well as in the focus group conversation, the organizers work hard to create close forum-system linkages; they see planning who will be in the Responders Group

and building relationships with those public administrators or officials, as key focii in the initial preparatory stages.

Even though these councils are only consultative, their convergence on a set of policy recommendations adds to the weight of their recommendations. Subsequently, the presentation and discussion of these recommendations at an open public forum, the Citizens' Café, offers public administrators and public officials an initial sense of how the larger public is likely to respond to the findings of the mini-public.

In contrast to the councils that serve an advisory function, in the councils that are used to catalyze a longer-term community sustainability effort, it is participants themselves who will be responsible for securing the implementation of their agreed-upon outcomes. To implement these outcomes, they will need to secure the cooperation of the various parties involved (local government, business, non-profits, and citizens). Thus, in *both* contexts, the implementation of outcomes is an important feature of the *Bürgerräte*, though it occurs in a different manner. I will say more about the facilitators' concern about implementation in the next section, where I explore the power of facilitators and process designers as "democratic professionals."

But first, to conclude this section: "feeling heard" may be a significant common factor in many of the beneficial outcomes that have been found to result from various kinds of facilitated mini-publics. My findings suggest that when, in addition, a process is designed to maximize the experience of "feeling *deeply* heard", as well as to spark human creativity, convergence may be more easily reached as participants discover common ground and find next steps forward without sacrificing their diversity of perspectives. This convergence on policy outcomes has significant implications with regard to the implementation of these outcomes. On the one hand, it adds weight to the recommendations. On the other hand, it results in greater disappointment if, after

all that hard work, the sponsors (elected officials and public administrators) do not respond to the work of the mini-public.

In their research on facilitator norms, Mansbridge et al. (2010) discovered that facilitators regard participants having an enjoyable experience as equally important to the substantive work they do; in a parallel vein, this research suggests that facilitators see the outcomes of forum participants' personal growth and transformation as equally important to policy outcomes. In addition, facilitators are *not* focused only on what happens inside the room; they also care deeply about the implementation of participants' policy outcomes, and the long-term impact of those outcomes on the larger systems sponsoring this work.

How Can Democracy Benefit from Honoring Facilitators as "Essential Workers" – And What Gets In the Way?

Another way to ask this question is, "How might we strengthen democracy by honoring more fully the essential work of facilitation and participatory process professionals in developing and spreading democratic innovations?" To answer that question, it may help to look more deeply at what has impeded our doing so. Thus, in this section, I address the elephant in the room: the issue of power, including both its potential for misuse as well as its potential for beneficial use by those who are in the role of facilitators and/or participatory process designers. I also touch on the relationship between facilitation and participatory process design, and how we might all benefit from encouraging the widespread development of this practical knowledge and skill-set.

What kinds of power do facilitators utilize to do their work? First, I offer the reminder that generally speaking, most of us tend to be much less aware of whatever power and privilege we ourselves may have, than of the power and privilege that others have -- especially when others' decisions affect us in some way. A teacher in a classroom, a nurse in a clinic, or a

professor in a seminar may not feel powerful themselves, but may instead think that their administrators wield power. Although I did not ask the facilitators in this study how they saw their own relationship to power, it's likely that they, too, might *not* describe themselves as powerful, especially as power tends to have a negative connotation among those dedicated to power-sharing.[83] However, many of the facilitators' statements and their descriptions of their actions acknowledge the influence they have on participants; in several places, the facilitators in this study spoke to how they saw their own role affecting participants in the group. I will recap some of those examples shortly.

In addition to having interpersonal influence, I also want to acknowledge that the role of facilitator *does* wield some structural power in a mini-public. While different in some ways, this power is analogous to the role of a teacher in a classroom or a nurse in a clinic or a professor in a seminar. Yet classrooms or clinics or seminars do *not* carry the same weight of being an instance of normative (and idealized) democracy in action -- though they could of course be designed and enacted as instances of democratic practice. Given the charged relationship between democracy and power, democracy theorists sometimes express their mistrust of the power inherent in the facilitator's role explicitly, other times tacitly; it can also show up as a general avoidance of thinking about the role altogether. However, power has a positive dimension as well as a shadow side, and the general avoidance of the subject means that overall, the positive aspect of the power and influence inherent in the facilitator's role has not been explored in much depth. Notable

[83] Both the abuse of power and the abuse of leadership leave much societal trauma in their wake; this sometimes leads progressives to "throw out the baby with the bathwater" and try to avoid power altogether. (Conservatives, in contrast, seem to be more pragmatic about the value of power and leadership.) One hopeful step toward healing in this area was how the Occupy movement promoted the valuable insight that instead of "we are leader*less*", a more accurate and helpful message would be "we are leader*ful*."

exceptions to this include Forester (1999, 2009, 2013, 2018), Mansbridge et al. (2006, 2010), Blong (2008), Escobar (2011, 2015, 2017, 2019), Moore (2012), and Dillard (2013).

To explore both dimensions of power more deeply, its positive uses as well as its potential and actual abuses, it can help to make some additional distinctions. Mary Parker Follett (1925b), mentioned earlier in the context of integrative process and its win-win outcomes, also bears the distinction of having been the first to make a distinction between "power over" or coercive power, a form of power whose intention it is to gain advantage over others; and "power-with" or collaborative power, a form of power whose intention is to catalyze and support others' agency for mutual benefit, and thus has a multiplier effect. The concept of power-with helps us identify the non-coercive, catalyzing power of the facilitator's role, of which we have already seen many examples in the facilitator narratives. Unlike most people in a position of power – but in a similar vein to therapists and mediators -- a facilitator's role is largely to listen, in an affirming and empathic manner, in order to both help others to hear themselves and also to help them hear one another. That is a significant part of their expertise, their leadership, and their influence.

For example, in their responses to the question about what they enjoy most about this work, several facilitators spoke to how their listening attention can have a positive influence on participants' state of mind: "Deep listening creates a very interesting effect in the person. They are really happy if you understand them well," and "when I ask them to go deeper, and when I mirror them, and when I listen to them, and when I repeat what they say, how they get into this reflective state, where they change their role from being passive to being active…." This influence extends beyond listening, to the facilitator's overall attitude: "I'm *not* just doing a job

and running an evening. It's my time as well, so be serious with me. I give you all my time, and my whole concentration, so that's what I ask from you. And that shapes the group as well."

At the same time, we need to recognize that in order to fulfill their role, facilitators or moderators also wield some degree of "power-over" or coercive power (Mansbridge, 2010, p. 82). Although facilitators don't give grades or dispense medication like educators and nurses do, they are clearly in a different role than participants, and generally offer some direction with regard to organizing turns, managing transitions, asking participants to wind up their comments, and so forth. Thus, while power-over, or coercive power, can easily be abused, it would be too simplistic to imply that is always negative. Whether the dynamics of pecking order and jockeying for position may be biologically innate to humans, part of socialization in this culture, or both, it is acknowledged that a facilitator is needed in mini-publics in part, to prevent those dynamics from arising among the participants. Escobar (2019) points out that even if a facilitator were not present, there would still be power dynamics in the room, albeit ones that might risk "replicating within the forum some of the broader inequalities in society" (p. 184). Similarly, Asenbaum (2016) states in his article on these councils that "it is the central power position of the moderators that potentially equalizes relations among participants" (pp. 8-9). At the same time, he calls this position "paradoxical," pointing to the complexity that needs to be unpacked about how (helpful) forms of power can be utilized to prevent (unhelpful) misuses of power.[84]

Although we need to give coercive power its due and appreciate its complexity, our culture tends to overemphasize that kind of power and neglect other kinds. Thus we also need to

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[84] Relevant here is Young's (1996) pointing out the inherent power dimension of (unfacilitated) agonistic deliberation, as part of her call for the term "communicative democracy" instead of "deliberative democracy" (pp. 122-125). Also relevant to an exploration of power are Polletta & Chen's (2013) observations how facilitators' influence, as well as the union of the more "feminine" approach of dialogue with the more "masculine" approach of deliberation has, in their view, "feminized" the field; they also expressing concerns about this effect (pp. 304-309). Both of these contributions merit much more intensive attention than I am able to give them here.

expand our focus to consider other forms of power. In the interest of maintaining nuance, we need to recognize that the power to influence can also be misused, especially when one is also in a formal role of authority or power-over, even if that authority is limited. For example, while care can be used with integrity to support others' empowerment, the appearance of care can be used manipulatively, as a used car salesperson might use empathic communication to build rapport with a potential client and then sell them a lemon. Yet although the appearance of care can be misused, this possibility should not blind us to the power of real caring.

The good news is that various studies have found that by and large, facilitators of minipublics use their power responsibly (Morrell, 2018, pp. 242-243; Li et al., 2013); that is to say, they refrain from using it negatively or abusing it. Yet studies of the *positive* uses of facilitator power are quite scarce by comparison (exceptions include Hardy et al., 2013). We know that the power to influence can be used in positive way, especially when the intention is *not* to influence participants' perspectives nor their actions but instead to create a warm and supportive climate for exploration, where diversity is welcome and collaboration can flourish (more on this, below). Alternatively, we could understand facilitators' power to influence as connected with their fine-grained design choices, as well as with their modeling of the deliberative dispositions (Forester & Kahane, 2009, pp. 227-230).[85] In either case, the study of how facilitators use their power to influence, or their generative power, to create a context where participants can develop their power-with has been largely absent from the literature on deliberative democracy. As Hendriks (2009) states, "we seem to know far less about how deliberative governance relates to the more empowering or generative forms of power" (p. 179.)

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[85] A useful list of key deliberative dispositions can be found on the website of the Deliberative Citizenship Initiative at Davidson College: https://deliberativecitizenship.org/deliberative-dispositions/

Kuyper (2012) makes a similar point about the prevalent focus within studies of leadership on the abuse of power, alongside the relative scarcity of studies on how leadership power can be used well. In his exploration of what constitutes good leadership in deliberative democracy, Kuyper points out both the general neglect of the topic within the field, as well as the limited view of leaders as "a necessary evil" that needs to be contained, instead of encouraging "trust in and capacity for good leadership" (p. 3).[86] This point applies to facilitators of mini-publics, in that they, too, are in a leadership role, as acknowledged by Landwehr (2014).

Yet although Kuyper (2012) recognizes the moderator of a mini-public as a leader, the bulk of his section on "Moderators as Leaders" is on how to *minimize their potentially coercive power*, rather than on how to develop their capacity for good leadership. His stress inadvertently (or ironically?) demonstrates that the challenge of understanding the positive use of power is a persistent one, even for those who might wish it otherwise.

What fuels concerns about potential misuse of facilitator power? Given the sticky nature of this concern, it makes sense to turn *toward* it for a moment, and look more closely at the fear of the potential abuse of power by facilitators and moderators. Although the studies mentioned above demonstrate the overall integrity of facilitators in the democratic innovations studied, we can also learn from one highly critical voice in recent years; Lee (2015) has been rightly concerned about the occurrence of "fascipulation" in corporate America. Given that in the US many facilitators work for business clients as well as for public engagement purposes, one of Lee's concerns is that they may be tainted by association.

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[86] Kuyper (2012) defines leadership as "an element of social influence in which one person enlists the aid and support of others in order to accomplish a common task" (p. 4); this influence-based definition seems quite applicable to the work of facilitation. The ability to "enlist the aid and support of others" would be an essential ingredient of power-with, or the power to elicit true collaboration rather than simple followership.

It's certainly true that corporations can induce professionals to act unethically. Although this possibility is not limited to facilitators but can include scientists and researchers and professors on a corporate payroll, corporations have become infamous for hiring professionals to create a "participatory patina" over something that has already been decided. This toxic practice is more prevalent than any of us would wish, but it also tends to backfire quite quickly; participants aren't stupid, they often see through the sham, and it leaves a bad taste in their mouth. The ensuing residue of distrust makes things worse for everyone involved, by reducing morale in a workplace or generalized trust in a community.[87]

Along these lines, Lee (2015) describes in detail a large-scale public engagement event in the US, a costly one underwritten by corporate sponsors, where important policy options were intentionally left off the table by the designers. I fully share the concerns about the harmful effects of such unethical practices. At the same time, Lee also mentions (albeit in much less detail) that most of the facilitators she met during the course of her extensive fieldwork usually work at a much smaller scale. She acknowledges her belief, based on multiple conversations, that most of these facilitators were doing their work with full integrity. This resonates with my own experience in doing this research; all of the facilitators and process designers I interviewed care deeply about their work and showed strong ethical orientations.

Yet Lee (2015) does *not* use these positive examples to place the harmful ones within a larger context. This is because in her view, even the many participatory efforts that are *not* ethically tainted in any way *still* have a net negative impact – as, according to her, they draw

[87] This is a well-known problem in the fields of group facilitation and public engagement, and facilitator ethics and training explicitly address this situation. Facilitators are taught that the proper role is to refuse to work under compromised terms of engagement, and instead to educate potential sponsors about how these kinds of schemes inevitably backfire, and offer ethical alternatives instead. For example, a consultant can recommend that management inform employees about a decision that has already been made, and focus the participation project on aspects that have *not* already been decided and where real input can be sought.

energy away from the work of creating social justice. Here is where we part ways. Lee repeatedly claims that in the '60s, all it took to create a revolution was a circle of folding chairs, thus implying that facilitators are superfluous and indeed, in her view, an obstacle. Yet if revolution is such a simple process, I don't see how facilitators and organizers can be held responsible for standing in the way. Instead, I concur with Dzur (2019) that an overemphasis on the "hermeneutics of suspicion" can unintentionally undermine the larger shared purpose of societal transformation (pp. 122-134).

At the same time, activists clearly have a significant role to play with regard to social change. As Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright (2003a) point out in their framework of empowered deliberation, if we want to ensure that the potential of engagement work is not co-opted, we need *both* engagement and activism, in a complementary and synergistic manner. Likewise, Kadlec and Friedman (2007) offer a very useful framing of what it means to be a "deliberative activist," and how that can be necessary for ensuring a serious response.

These are some of the controversies with regard to the larger field of public participation and engagement, and its potential to both help and harm on a macro level, that touch on the power and responsibility inherent in the roles of facilitators / organizers / participatory process designers, as well as the fear and mistrust that these roles seems to generate.

In the interviews, I repeatedly heard that these public participation professionals do *not* want to be taking part in something that will only cause resentment and cynicism. Instead, they *want for their work to matter*, and *want to protect its integrity*. Thus, they have a deep personal and professional stake in ensuring a strong "forum-system link," although they don't use that term. They care about the participants, they care about improving policy, and they care about the quality and integrity of their own work. Although none of them claimed that the work they were

doing would bring about whole-scale social transformation any time soon (at least not without significant scaling), they did see their work as a positive contribution to society. I saw these commitments in both the interviews and the focus group. Those commitments also resonate with my own experience as a professional facilitator / participatory process designer. Yes, facilitators and process designers hold positions of power. By definition, they have the potential to abuse that power as well as to use their power for helpful ends. Yet, as mentioned previously, studies have repeatedly found that most facilitators use their power well (Morrell, 2018, pp. 242-243; Li et al., 2013; Hardy et al., 2013). We may assume that facilitators do not misuse their power in part because they know that this would quickly damage both their own professional reputation as well as the reputation of their field of practice. Yet the interviews in this study illustrate facilitators' strong and genuine commitments to care for participants and for the quality of participants' experience. I am curious less about why facilitators choose to not misuse their power than *how* facilitators use their power well.

What can it look like when facilitators use their power well? In turning to the helpful uses of facilitator power, we can formulate the question that has emerged as follows: How do facilitators use their appreciative power[88] and their power to influence, as well as their limited amount of power-over in the room, to generate power-with among participants?

I will begin by describing some findings from previous research (Zubizarreta, 2002), where I found a group process in the literature that closely resembles the atmosphere generated by the Dynamic Facilitation approach. In humanistic, person-centered education, the teacher is seen as a facilitator of learning, rather than as the provider of knowledge. The facilitation of

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[88] In the field of organization development, Smith (2009) has developed a triune model which includes three different kinds of power: appreciation, influence and control.

learning is based on the application of Rogers' three conditions that support human growth: empathy, unconditional positive regard, and authenticity (more on those three conditions below). Rogers (1983) describes a person-centered classroom by using the term "facilitator":

> When a facilitator creates, to an even modest degree, a [group] climate characterized by all that she can achieve of realness, prizing, and empathy; when she trusts the constructive tendency of the individual and the group; then she discovers that she has inaugurated an educational revolution. Learning of a different quality, proceeding at a different pace, with a greater degree of pervasiveness, occurs. Feelings –positive, negative, confused--- become a part of the [group] experience. Learning becomes life, and a very vital life at that. The [participant] is on the way, sometimes excitedly, sometimes reluctantly, to becoming a learning, changing being. (p. 128)

I have substituted three words: "group" in two places where "classroom" appeared in the original, and "participant" instead of "student." These small changes give us an apt description of the energy in a *Bürgerrat*, as described in the facilitator narratives in Chapter 4.

I realize that this analogy is risky, as a traditional hierarchical classroom can be the very opposite of what we are attempting to create in a public forum. Yet a humanistic, person-centered classroom (something few of us have actually experienced) is a very different context than traditional hierarchical schooling. At any rate, Rogers' (1983) experience, based on his observation of classrooms where teachers practiced a student-centered approach, resonates deeply with facilitators' narratives of their most memorable *Bürgerräte*.

What are the sources of facilitators' power to help? In Carl Rogers' (1980b) humanistic view, he posited all humans as having an internal drive for "self-actualization"; this term has many parallels with how today we might describe humans as "self-organizing complex adaptive systems." Although humans have the potential to cause harm and even engage in malevolence, our potential for good is at least equally strong. Within the humanistic field of organization development, McGregor's (1960) work on "theory X and theory Y" affirmed the

experiential truth that how human beings act depends largely on context; he maintained that those managers who trust employees tend to elicit more responsible behavior from their employees than managers who distrust their employees and seek to overcontrol and micro-manage. His work was based on the philosophical assumption that our views on the nature of human beings have significant import, both on how we treat others and in turn, on the behavior we elicit from others.

Most writers within the overlapping fields of democratic innovation (Escobar & Elstub, 2019; Smith, 2009), empowered participatory governance (Fung & Wright, 2003b), the “new civic politics” (Boyte et al., 2014), and deliberative democracy (Bächtiger et al., 2018), have a hopeful orientation regarding the potential inherent in human beings for caring about collective well-being. At the same time, culturally speaking, we are all still in the midst of the larger transition described by Liu and Hanauer in *The Gardens of Democracy* (2011), moving from a more individualistic and static “machine brain” view of humans to a more wholistic “garden brain.”

The view we hold of human beings matters, and all of us have been socialized to one degree or another by the prevalent mindset of technical rationality (Schön, 1983) or machine brain. Extrapolating from physics, the indeterminacy principle suggests that what we find as a researcher is influenced by the kinds of experiments we set up and how we as researchers interact with the phenomenon. Furthermore, our own changing worldviews may lead us to conceive of new and different experiments. Although I do not advocate experiments with animals, some research from the late 1970s on how different social contexts draws out different kinds of behaviors in rats (Alexander, 2010) has been recently reinforced by newer research (Venniro et al., 2018, as reported in the National Institute for Drug Abuse [NIDA], 2018). Before

these studies, earlier experiments had found rats to be highly susceptible to addictive substances. Yet both studies mentioned above showed that when the laboratory conditions are changed so that rats have opportunities for healthy social interaction with one another, the outcomes change. When rats are not placed in either isolated or overcrowded conditions, they will largely ignore the drugs. These scientists' experiments brought out the best, not the worst, in the rats.

I find this to be an evocative illustration of the importance of "context, context, context" for influencing which aspects of living beings' potential are enacted. As we saw in the beginning of Chapter 2, one way of defining the role of the facilitator is that of creating "a climate of mutual respect and psychological safety that makes it possible for people to consider creative new solutions and move from preconceived positions" (Creighton, 2005, p. 169) – in other words, creating a group climate that brings out the best in people.

In order to do this, one's own inner development is key. It is a truism in the world of organizational consulting that "the success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor" (Bill O'Brien, as quoted by Scharmer, 2013, para. 4). Through their repeated comments about the responsibility of managing their own well-being and attitude when they enter the room, the facilitators in this study indicated that they share this basic outlook. The Art of Hosting practice teaches that hosting others begins with the ability to "host yourself first", to be fully present and comfortable within our own skin. This inner preparation was mentioned several times in the facilitator interviews in Chapter 4, as in the comment about stepping into one's own "biggest possibility of being human" – stepping into the ability to be deeply present, to be reflective instead of reactive, to be compassionate instead of judgmental.

Practitioners know that for the work of group facilitation, this inner work makes a difference (Jenkins & Jenkins, 2006; Friedman, 2014). From a Rogerian, person-centered

perspective, the ability to create the conditions for human flourishing depends on our ability to genuinely appreciate others, while "listening to understand" and communicatively empathizing with their experience.[89] From his personal experiences as well as from the research he and others conducted, Rogers (1980) concluded that there were three "necessary and sufficient" conditions for supporting human development across a variety of contexts (while the basic concepts remained constant, the terms he used varied over the years, as his thought evolved and became more nuanced). The first is "the ability to listen empathically," often described in shorthand as empathy or understanding; the second one started out as "unconditional positive regard," later described as "caring" or "prizing"; and the third is authenticity, congruence, or genuineness. We might also call these the facilitative dispositions, and following Rogers, consider all three as necessary for being an effective "gardener" of humans-in-relationship.

In his era, Rogers' (1980) person-centered approach was widely applied in many fields, beyond its origins in therapy; he also worked extensively with groups of different kinds. In summing up what he had learned over the course of his lifetime, he wrote,

> On the basis of my experience I have found that if I can help bring about a climate marked by genuineness, prizing, and understanding, then exciting things happen. Persons and groups in such a climate move away from rigidity and toward flexibility, away from static living toward process living, away from dependence toward autonomy, away from defensiveness toward self-acceptance, away from being predictable toward an unpredictable creativity. They exhibit living proof of an actualizing tendency. (pp. 43-44)

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[89] While Mary Follett lived long before Rogers' time, I find it instructive to read Lyndall Urwick's (1949/1987) description of how she interacted with others: "Part of her genius was a genius for friendship, for human contact. Her secret is difficult to convey to those who have not had the inestimable privilege of meeting her. It seemed to be a combination of sympathy and detachment, a meeting of the intensely individual and the universal. Whoever she met, and intellectual and social distinction made no difference –it was Lord Haldane of Cloan one minute and a maidservant or a bus conductor the next – she made them talk, from the heart as well as from the head. She conveyed to them her own vivid personal interest in life. Without for a moment appearing curious or interfering she made them feel that their personal experience was of real moment to her. Simultaneously, and without any loss of individual sympathy, she dignified and enlarged it by making them see that part of her interest lay in the fact that the individual experience was a microcosm of life as a whole" (p. xvi).

Yet when it comes to groups, these three conditions may not be sufficient.[90] Especially when working in a public context, structure matters as well. In his reflections on the practice narratives of community and environmental mediators, Forester (2009) uses the phrase, “the subtle ritual structuring of participation” to describe how the structures of talk “shape speakers and listeners both, shape the spaces we inhabit, the ways we are able to listen, the respect we give one another, the relationships we are able to reconstruct, and the historical memory we rebuild together” (p. 32).[91] Some structures can be constraining and stultifying (the instance he offers along these lines is Roberts’ Rules of Order), while others (in his example, the indigenous council circle practice) are particularly well-designed to offer participants the sense that “they will count, that they will all be heard, and that they will all be able to express their concerns, their anger, their pains, and their hopes together” (p. 32). Forester emphasizes that these simple yet powerful structures result in richer storytelling, in mutual respect and recognition, and “enable those present to actually listen, learn and act together in new ways” (p. 33).

The findings in this study affirm that what facilitators and participatory process professionals have to offer, and the source of their power to help, is a combination of their listening skills, the attitudes and dispositions they cultivate which govern their use of these skills, and their ability to offer some simple yet powerful structures. This “process expertise,” which has both inner and outer components (Molinengo et al., 2021), allows them to co-create contexts

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[90] In Rogers’ later work with encounter groups, a format in which he participated but did not invent, he accepted the existence of a “smuggled-in” fourth condition of interpersonal confrontation, endemic in the group work of his day. While it was rationalized as part of “authenticity,” I have been told by people who were there at the time that Rogers never personally engaged in interpersonal confrontation. Instead, he would stay silent until the group had passed through a highly conflictual phase and arrived at a more “kumbaya” stage, at which point he would become more active. Given that interpersonal confrontation is *not* a part of the Dynamic Facilitation approach, I see Rogers’ work in person-centered education as more applicable to the work of the *Bürgerräte* than his work with encounter groups. For more, see Zubizarreta (2002).

[91] For more on deliberative rituals and transformative learning, see Forester (1999, pp. 115-153).

that bring out the best in other human beings. While often invisible, facilitators themselves, and the dispositions they cultivate and embody, are a key ingredient in creating that context. Nancy Glock-Gruenich describes the work of higher education as "to elicit, enable, and empower our higher capacities". Those words aptly describe the work of educators at any level -- and also the work of facilitators, to the degree that they aim to facilitate self-directed learning and maturation.[92]

Given all this, how might we leverage the expertise of facilitators and participatory process designers as "gardeners of democracy"? To paraphrase Oliver Escobar's (2019) insight about the historical lack of attention to facilitation in deliberative processes, when we ignore the work that facilitators do, we also ignore the workers (p. 179). Yet we can celebrate that long-standing patterns in this regard have been starting to change, and more academics are beginning to attend to the work that facilitators do, as well as to the workers themselves. In a recent book mentioned earlier, on the professionalization of public participation mentioned, Bherer et al. (2017) introduce the term "public participation professional" or PPPs, for practitioners who engage in some combination of the four different aspects of work that Chilvers (2012) mapped out: orchestrating, practicing, coordinating, and studying. Among the research participants in this study, there are professionals with many years of experience, many of whom have significant experience in orchestrating public participation projects and coordinating initiatives to grow this field, not just "practicing" as a facilitator. At the same time, they do not disavow their beginnings; no one appeared offended by being called a facilitator, even with all of the other roles that they also play at different times.

[92] In this context, I have been greatly inspired by the work of Karol E. Soltan (1999), who affirms that the main personal and political task ought to be to support the work of maturation (pp. 31-36).

When this continuum is not understood, facilitators of small groups in mini-publics can sometimes be seen as just a “pair of hands,” rather than seeing this work as an essential aspect of the experience that informs the work of process designers -- and that also develops the interpersonal skills that public participation professionals bring to their work when in an orchestrating role, connecting with those in formal roles of political authority with the means to sponsor these events. In Vorarlberg, it is considered best practice for those who will be doing the facilitation to also be included in the design process as part of the design team. As we saw in the facilitator narratives, it is not uncommon for those who have been facilitators and process designers to eventually take on the work of orchestrating these events.

This inclusive attitude is familiar to me, as in my own training in organization development,[93] I was mentored by academics who were also practitioners of participatory human systems redesign. These mentors saw work with individuals and with groups, work designing participatory processes, and work establishing co-creative rapport with project sponsors, as all being part of a broader continuum (Eisen, 1995). While we may start out at one end and grow our way toward the other end of the continuum, it’s inherently all of a piece.

Within the field of democratic innovations, Escobar (2017, 2019) has made a case for having facilitators be hired as public administration staff who work for government directly.

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[93] Many organization development consultants work in business contexts. It is clear that the resource-extractive game of unlimited economic growth has been destroying our planet, and that simply helping businesses become kinder and gentler places in which to work, is not enough to address this challenge. Yet before dismissing the relevance of OD to the work of democratic innovations, we might consider that Kurt Lewin, one of the field’s founders, was a social and organizational psychologist committed to making a difference with regard to social problems including prejudice and racism. Mary P. Follett, now being reclaimed as another founder of OD, responded to questions about her own journey from the study of formal government, to decades of working in community organizing, to consulting with business managers, as follows: “whatever changes should come, whether industry is owned by individual capitalists, or by the State, or by the workers, it will always have to be managed. Management is a permanent function of business” (Metcalf & Urwick, 1940/2013, p.18). It was personally very heartening to find this quote recently, as it resonated with my own reasons for entering the field of OD as a social change activist, over two decades ago.

Alternatively, Molinengo et al. (2021) highlight the advantages of having facilitators and process experts who are situated as researchers in prestigious university settings. Escobar's recommended approach is already in place in Scotland, and could be a viable alternative in other locations. Both of these approaches, situating PPPs within research institutions or within public administration, would certainly be a way to avoid the guilt-by-association that accrues to freelancers who may also work with the business sector, and are thus often labeled in the literature as "corporates" or as part of the "public engagement industry." The problem with these labels is that they ignore and misidentify the many public participation professionals who work for non-profits or who are freelancers, working ethically with many different kinds of clients.

At any rate, the state government of Vorarlberg has *not* been following Escobar's proposal and bringing all of their facilitators in-house. Instead, they have a number of freelance consultants with whom they work on a regular basis, and whom they introduce to the larger community through a friendly page on the Bürgerräte website that builds transparency, while serving to both introduce the work to the larger community and further institutionalize it.[94] The *Bürgerrat* website calls these public participation professionals "accompaniers"; that is, professionals who accompany the Citizens' Councils – a term with echoes of an earlier proposal by Forester (2009) that facilitators/mediators/ etc. could be termed "civic friends" (p. 33.)

My own perspective is yes to all of the above, and more. It is wonderful to have researchers with process expertise in universities, and also to have in-house public administrators with extensive process expertise. The dedicated professionals who initially developed the practice of *Bürgerräte* in Austria were public administrators -- some of whom started out as

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[94] Here is an opportunity to see the faces of some of these practitioners whose words you have read, and to read their short personal statements:
https://translate.google.com/translate?sl=de&tl=en&u=https://www.buergerrat.net/at/vorarlberg/akteure/begleitung/

environmental activists before becoming curious about creating change from the inside. The research participants in this study are a varied lot, including free-lance consultants, researchers, and public administrators. At the same time, we also need to go beyond those three realms.

Part of what inspires me about the Art of Hosting community of practice is its dedication to developing process expertise more broadly among the lay public, as mentioned by Bertram in Chapter 4. Sharing our own process expertise more broadly is also the aim of the Dynamic Facilitation community of practice[95]. Within the realm of activism, the goal of developing broad societal capacity in the process arts is held by activist organizations such as Extinction Rebellion[96] and Trust the People[97]. As mentioned earlier, we will always need both surgeons as well as "barefoot doctors"; thus, we need to celebrate both the professionalization of public participation, *and* also engage in efforts to develop basic process expertise at the community level (Howard, 2012). For this, we need to honor the essential work of facilitators, wherever they may be situated. As we do so, we will be supporting these dedicated workers in their commitment to facilitating democracy at all levels of scale – whether in families, in communities, in neighborhoods, in workplaces, in regional networks, or at municipal, state, or federal levels, as in Austria's recent first national Climate Assembly, the KlimaRat.

Limitations of This Study

This initial exploratory research has been limited to practitioner narratives. As I am not a German speaker, I have not had the opportunity to interview any of the participants in these

[95] https://dynamicfacilitation.org/dynamic-facilitation/?lang=en

[96] https://www.xrdemocracy.uk/

[97] https://www.trustthepeople.earth/

councils; in future research, I hope to collaborate with others so that I can learn first-hand from participants as well as from facilitators and organizers.

Although all of the participants in this study spoke English quite well, my own lack of ability to communicate in German has been a definite limitation. Cultural differences may also have created some degree of misunderstanding that escaped my notice. Although participants have reviewed and approved the interview transcripts, they have not seen the larger conclusions I have drawn from their stories. I look forward to their ongoing feedback as a way to learn what I got right and what I didn't – and also as a way to continue learning about new developments.

My own experience with this facilitation methodology offered some significant benefits to the research process, as it offered a certain degree of understanding of the content that participants were sharing with me. Yet at the same time, it may have also limited me in some ways. I did my best to explicitly take on the role of a naïve and curious interviewer without denying my own experience, by explaining that I was asking "beginner's mind" questions for research purposes. Still, despite my best intentions, there may be things I took for granted, or clarification questions that I neglected to ask, as the answers appeared obvious to me.

I don't want to minimize the influence of context; the context in which these Austrian Citizen Councils have developed and spread is unique, and parts of the design may or may not generalize to other contexts. Also, as in most research, I am studying the past, "the light from the distant stars"; thus, by the time I complete this dissertation, many evolutionary changes to the *Bürgerräte* may have already taken place that I have not been able to document here.

Another set of limitations is inherent to the exploratory nature of this study. This has truly been a process of discovery, and so I intentionally started out with a set of broader and more general questions. This means that while I obtained rich findings, I was not able to go in-depth in

my interviews with regard to various particular areas that emerged as I read and re-read the stories and reflected on their implications. Nonetheless, I hope this narrative quilt will serve as a useful invitation for others to engage in further research on the Vorarlberg *Bürgerräte*.

In Closing

Over the course of my research, one of the most inspiring framings I've encountered is Dr. Debra Hawhee's (2021), "deliberation as the practice of imagining shared futures together". The work of imagining shared futures together is sorely needed, and it is work for which these councils seem well-suited. While the *Bürgerräte* continue to spread in various parts of Austria and Germany, the professionals who organize and facilitate these forums would like to see them being used even more, in order to contribute as much as possible to the great needs of our times. Despite the limitations of this study, I hope to have shown that more research is called for, to continue to explore and document the work of these councils.

In a thoughtful article on listening, Andrew Dobson (2012) ends with an evocative question: "How different would our political institutions and their practices look, if we were to take listening seriously?" (p. 858). I imagine that Jim Rough, the creator of Dynamic Facilitation and Wisdom Councils, might tweak that question slightly to ask, "How different would our political institutions and their practices look, if we were to take human creativity seriously?" Furthermore, I imagine that the older woman in the Salzburg Council might ask, "How different would our political institutions and their practices look, if we were to take *Guete* [human kindness] seriously?"

I dedicate this work to the committed organizers and facilitators of the Vorarlberg Bürgerräte, who have been offering us one small yet potent response to all three of these questions.

CODA

For the oral presentation of my dissertation, I closed with a spoken word performance:

what I've learned,
about strong democracy's essential workers...

nearly invisible,
they care

they care about
the work of caring

they care about
making a space
where each person can be heard

and they care about
what happens afterward
so participants' time
will be well spent

they are the ones,
setting the table
bringing you your food,
serving you your drinks
at the Habermasian café

so others can feel welcome
to sit around the table and talk

yes, they care about being good hosts
they care about participants' feeling welcome,
having opportunities to connect with one another,
having a meaningful and enjoyable time…

these essential workers care about democracy,
they care about learning and growing and experimenting,
becoming better at what they do…

the hard work of listening and caring,
welcoming conflicts, diverse perspectives,
difficult feelings, and creative ideas

your waiter
is also an opera singer
your hostess,
a performance artist
your maître d',
a set designer

and here,
they are the ones clearing the table,
making the coffee,
putting away the food…

wait – are their hands clean,
you ask?
can you really trust them to handle,
what you are eating and drinking?

yes, they too, have power –
the power of a good listener
to draw you out,
in ways you had not expected…

can you trust them to use this power well?
after all, you hardly know them
they are not the ones
who have been speaking…

but ah,
they could tell you quite a tale or two
of what they've seen and heard,

if only you
were willing to listen…

Rosa Zubizarreta-Ada
Berkshire mountains in Massachusetts
Aug 15, 2022

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APPENDIX A

Table A1: Participants' Demographics, Background, and Experience Level

#	Age, gender, nationality, ethnicity	Current professional role	Educational background, professional experience	Experience with / role in Bürgerräte,
1	51 yrs, male; German; Northern European	Independent consultant; Art of Hosting teacher	Social work & pedagogy; creator of a social services non-profit	Co-facilitated 3 state-wide councils in Vorarlberg, & several smaller Bürgerräte; co-creator of 7 councils in Berlin; main organizer of one in rural Germany.
2	37 yrs, male; Austrian; Northern European	Public administrator	Over 15 years in public administration	25 to 30 councils. Facilitated 10, organized and administered the others.
3	36 yrs, male; Austrian; northern European	Independent consultant	Computer science, IT consultant.	About 20. 2/3 Youth Councils (organizing and facilitating), 1/3 Wisdom Councils.
4	60 yrs, female; Austrian; northern European	Independent consultant; facilitation & process design	Public administration; travel; staff at educational center; individual & team coaching	25 councils. Facilitated 21 of them, helped organize the others.
5	43 yrs, male; Austrian; northern European	Independent consultant	Videography, consulting. Experience w/DF in business context.	4 councils; facilitated 3, design team for one.
6	50 yrs, female; Austrian; northern European	Sustainability researcher	PhD in ecological economics; studied environmental systems science. Experience w/ DF in research context.	Facilitated 10 Bürgerräte á la Vorarlberg.
7	50 yrs, female; German; northern European	Independent consultant in mediation and group facilitation	CEO of small company; self-employed mediator	Part of facilitation team for two Bürgerräte processes, part of design team for two.
8	50 yrs, male; Austrian; northern European	Public administrator	Responsible for democratic reform & democratic innovation projects at level of State Parliament	Organized the first Bürgerrat in his state, and was there as witness.
9	61 yrs; male; Austrian; northern European	Public administrator; Art of Hosting coordinator.	Integrative dance; group dynamics; biology teacher; coord. art projects in schools. Then, 24 years as PA working with public engagement.	Extensive experience organizing and facilitating community and state-wide Bürgerräte.
10	50 yrs; female; Austrian; northern European	Self-employed organizational consultant	Social work on women's issues; freelance group facilitation for staff retreats; work at non-profit, coaching local officials on engaging young people.	Has been on the facilitation team for 5 or 6 Bürgerräte. As such, also participated in the planning process.
11	59 yrs; female; Austrian; northern European	Coordinator for citizen participation for Local Agenda 21.	Has been in current role for nearly 20 years.	Organized and/or facilitated 10 or 12 Bürgerräte.

APPENDIX B

Interview and focus group questions

1. Protocol and questions for Individual Interviews

These interviews were semi-structured. After the welcome and warm-up, I offered some initial questions. Then I followed participants' lead by asking follow-up and clarifying questions.

A. Welcome, connection, and clarification

1. Thank you for being willing to participate in this research…
2. How are you today?
3. Do you have any questions about this process?

B. Demographic information

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Nationality
4. Ethnicity

C. Overall experience with facilitating Citizens' Councils

1. How many?
2. What were the general topics of each?
3. Your own role in these councils - in addition to being part of the facilitating team, were you part of the design team or consulting team in some way, for either pre-work and/or follow-up work?

D. Joys and Challenges

1. What have you enjoyed the most about facilitating these councils?
2. What has been most challenging?

E. Focusing on a particular memorable experience

1. Now I am inviting you to choose a particular moment that stands out for you as memorable, whether a particularly challenging one or a particularly meaningful one, and to describe it in more detail. Do you have one in mind?

2. If yes, please start describing this moment: what led up to that moment, and how you felt as it was occurring.

   At this point, I invited a thicker level of detail through follow-up and clarifying questions.
   Additional questions as needed: --what actions did you take in response?
   --what happened next?
   --what was the outcome of that?

3. *If the participant was having difficulty choosing a particular moment*: please tell me a bit about the various possibilities you are considering….

   …then I invited the participant to choose one, and to start describing it per #2 above.

   If they were not able to recall any particular moment, my fall-back plan was to ask them to choose a particular council, and tell me about their overall experience with facilitating that council. I thought it likely that a particular moment would emerge from that.

   However, I never had the opportunity to test that hunch, as each participant was able to readily recall one or more memorable moments.

F. Reflecting on the story

1. So now that you have shared that incident, I'm curious about what strikes you about this experience. What insights might you draw from it?

   --these insights might be about how human beings behave in a group context….

   --and/or about the work of the facilitator in facilitating Citizens' Councils…

2. What do you see as the role of this incident, with regard to the outcomes of this particular council?

3. Any other thoughts or comments about what you have shared?

G. Closing

1. Thank you for your participation. A reminder that your participation is voluntary, and you have the freedom to withdraw from the research at any time.

2. Reminder about what happens next, should you choose to continue:
   you will receive a full transcript to review.

3. Later on, any quotes from your interview that I may wish to use for the dissertation and/or future publications will be first reviewed with you. You will have the right to remain anonymous and to have any identifying details changed. You will also have the right to be quoted by name, if you so choose.

II. Protocol and questions for Focus group

After the pilot interviews had taken place, the four pilot study participants were invited to participate in a facilitated focus group. The focus group met on zoom and was recorded.

A. Welcome, clarifications, and connection

1. Thank you for being here. In a moment, we'll begin with a brief check-in round for introductions. But first, everyone OK for me to start the recording?

2. Next, I want to introduce my research assistant. He is a formal part of this research process, and is also bound by a confidentiality agreement.

3. Speaking about confidentiality, I am asking each of you to agree to hold confidentiality with regard to the content of what others share in this group. You are welcome to share with others what you yourself have learned, but not the details of anyone else's story.

   Each of you has already taken part in an individual interview with me; during our time here together, I will be inviting you to share with the group, one insight that arose for you from that interview, and we will be exploring those insights. While we are *not* expecting the conversation to be about any particularly private issues, our research ethics guidelines require us to ask you for confidentiality, both with regards to *what* others say during this time, and also, with regard to the very fact of their participation. In other words, you are welcome to say that you yourself participated in this study, but please allow others to decide for themselves, whether they wish to disclose their participation or not. Are there any questions about this, or about any other aspect of the research process?

   After responding to any questions that may emerge…

4. Ok, so now we will pause for a moment, to give everyone an opportunity to consider again, whether you are willing to agree with these requests for confidentiality – both with regard to what is said, and also, who is here (*show of hands*) ….

5. And now, I want to offer each of you the opportunity to reconsider, whether you still want to continue to participate in this voluntary research process. If not, this can be a good opportunity to step back.

   The reason for saying this now, is that even though you will still have the right to withdraw from the study afterward, once someone has participated in a focus group, it is not possible to simply erase the "effect" that your presence and participation has had on the other participants. So, even if you later choose to withdraw from the study (which you will still be free to do), we would still need to include your (anonymous) contributions within the focus group as part of this research, to help make sense of the other participants' responses. Does that make sense? Any questions?

6. Ok, now for the introductions. I am suggesting that we now do a brief round of check-ins… your name, where you are from, and why you were drawn to participate in this study.

   After the initial introductions and check-ins…

B. Exploring the topic

1. Thanks, everyone. Now we'll go around the circle one more time. Each of you has already taken part in an individual interview with me; I'd like to invite you to share with the group, one insight that arose for you, from that interview. You may also want to share a bit about the context, the incident that gave rise to that insight. To prep for this, we'll start with a few minutes of silent free-writing, so that you can think about what you might want to share.

2. *After the free-write…* Ok… now we are going back into the circle format. When it is your turn, you are welcome to say whatever you would like in response to the prompt; it might be different from what you had originally written down. What you have on paper is a fall-back, so you don't need to worry about what you will say when it's your turn; that way you have the opportunity to listen to one another more deeply.

   During this round, I may be reflecting back from time to time, and asking clarifying questions for understanding. *(About 5 min per participant for this round.)*

3. *Next, participants were invited. to respond to one another in a more free-form style. The facilitator invited pauses from time to time, paraphrasing and/or summarizing as needed.*

4. *At some point in the conversation, as appropriate / if needed, the researcher interjected the following questions into the mix:*

   --given what you are exploring here, what does this imply about your view of human beings, and the different ways we can relate with one another in the face of differences?

   --given what you are exploring here, what does this imply about the possibilities for social change? In other words, how might all this be leveraged, for the purpose of supporting widespread social change?

C. **Closing**

1. Thank you so much for your participation, and all the rich insights you have offered!
   What happens next: you will be receive a copy of the harvest document from this session.
2. Later on, any final version of the harvest that I plan to include in the dissertation and/or future publications will be sent to you again for your review and approval. You will have the right to remain anonymous and to have any identifying details changed.
3. As mentioned in the initial consent form, you still have the right to withdraw from the study at any point. However, as we mentioned at the beginning of the session, if you choose to do so now that you have participated in the group it will not possible to "erase" the effect you have had on others. As such, we would need to still include in the harvest, the anonymous contributions you have made here, in order to help make sense of other participants' responses.

APPENDIX C

Natural Experiments with the Citizens' Council Model

I stated earlier (p. 127) that my primary intention in this project was *not* to study the evolution of these councils. Therefore, I did not ask specific questions along these lines. Nonetheless, given my initial assumptions about public participation professionals as reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983), I did expect to encounter some "practitioner experiments" in the course of conducting the interviews and focus group. This turned out to be the case; I came across many instances of innovation and experimentation.

In most instances, I limited myself to asking a few clarifying questions to gain a clearer understanding of the phenomenon involved. I did not usually go much beyond that, especially if it was not relevant to the main narrative being explored. However, the evolution of these councils, and the ongoing experimentation of organizers and practitioners in this field, merits further research. As a step toward that end, I have compiled an initial thematized description below of the various kinds of natural experiments I encountered in the course of this project.

Some of this material is a recapitulation of what has already been included in Chapter 4, although organized in a different manner. When that is the case, I include page references. However, some of the material described below does not appear elsewhere in this dissertation, as I was not able to use all of the interview material that I gathered. Those examples are still included in this Appendix for the sake of completeness.

Before proceeding, I want to mention a few of the factors that I believe have contributed to the creative ferment I witnessed in the course of this project. As mentioned above, experimentation is an inherent aspect of professional practice (Schön, 1983). At the same time, some professionals are exemplars in this regard. Manfred Hellrigl, former director of the *Büro*

für Zukunftsfragen, now the *Büro für Freiwilliges Engagement und Beteiligung* (pp. 18-19, 134), embodies a strong commitment to the values of reflective practice, continuous learning and experimentation. His influence shaped a culture at the *Büro* that continues to this day. Michael Lederer, current director of the *Büro* and one of the practitioners interviewed for this study, also places a very high value on reflection, ongoing learning and experimentation.

Then there is Jim Rough. While I never had the opportunity to attend the Dynamic Facilitation seminars he began offering in Europe starting in 2005, I attended many of his trainings in the U.S. between 2000 and 2006. On repeated occasions, when asked by participants "what would happen if we changed x or if we did y differently?", Jim would begin by explaining why he had come to do things a certain way. Yet if the person persisted in their questioning, Jim's oft-repeated response was along the lines of, "Try it out and see what happens! We are still in discovery mode here… we're just making this stuff up as we go along… oh, and don't forget to let me know what happens, when you try that!"

In the various instances below, I too would love to learn more about "what happened, when you tried that?"

I. Experiments with involving elected officials and public administrators in:

a) experiencing a facilitated process,

b) helping design the council,

c) attending the council

One narrative briefly referenced earlier took place at meeting during a council planning process (see pp. 160-161). An innovation here was that a representative group of the town's elected officials and public administrators were invited to participate in a facilitated planning

process to design the council (thus 'a' and 'b' above.) It seems from the description of the outcome (the establishment of a new conflict resolution office in the town administration) that this part of the process went well.

Because of Corona, at the time of the interview the actual council had not taken place yet. However, the council had been designed in such a way that some of the town's elected officials and public administrators were going to also be among the participants of the council (as in 'c' above)[98] in addition to participating in the design process. My impression from subsequent brief conversations that were not part of this project, is that this part of the experiment is unlikely to be repeated, or at least not in the same manner. Nonetheless, there could be value from a careful study of what happened and lessons learned. Was it the same elected officials and public administrators who attended both the design process, and then later participated in the council itself? Or was it different ones? What were the difficulties? Were there any positive outcomes?

We saw in Chapter 4 (pp. 11 -115) a different experiment with having elected officials, in this case the mayor, attend a portion of the council. This was done so they could give feedback on the ideas that participants had explored thus far, before they finalized their recommendations. While this led to some short-term frustration, in the end it seemed to enhance the process.

In another narrative, we heard about a situation where the special committee that sponsored the first *Bürgerrat* in Saltzburg had the opportunity to participate in a facilitated process ('a' above) as part of doing their own work (pp. 138-142). This committee was *not* helping to design the actual council itself, as in the previous example, nor were they active participants in that council. I did not think to ask how many other committee members (in addition to Josef himself) had the opportunity to attend the council that the committee sponsored,

[98] One earlier experiment elsewhere in including a number of elected officials as part of a sortition-based council was the first Irish Convention on the Constitution, 2013-2104. See https://www.constitutionalconvention.ie/.

even as witnesses or observers. Yet this instance of experimentation with involving elected officials and public administrators in a facilitated process bears mentioning here for at least two reasons: one, it was successful (as shown by the committee members wanting more of these experiences) and two, when a future opportunity presents itself, this could be a way to build a stronger rapport between meeting sponsors and council organizers.

II. Experiments with the timing of *when* the council is held, in relationship to the larger political cycle

In one interview, an organizer / facilitator described his initial misgivings at holding a council during the election season. He then described how this led to an unexpected positive outcome where the outcomes of this council were adopted as part of the platform of the incoming party; this meant that the implementation of these outcomes were closely monitored by the State (p. 164). This is an example where a "natural experiment" was initiated by circumstance rather than by human design, yet much can still be learned from it.

III. Experiments with different ways for community members to participate in or contribute to a council

In one of the interviews, an organizer / facilitator reported that sometimes elderly participants asked if they could bring along a companion; this was allowed in order to encourage their participation. They also mentioned that sometimes young people expressed that they would not be able to stay for the entire council; again, the response of the organizers was often flexible in order to encourage their participation.

I will place the *JugendRat* in this category of “different ways for community members to participate”, though they could also fit in the next category of “experiments with council size, structure, and length”. Created specifically to welcome young people’s input on their needs and recommendations for municipal programs, these Youth Councils are designed to be only one day long. Also, only young people are invited to participate in them (pp. 128 - 129).

At one statewide council on the “Future of Agriculture”, a significant innovation had to do with how the voices, expertise, and lived experience of the farmers and *farmerinnen* were brought in. Given their long work hours, the decision was made to host small groups for them to address the issue, film those conversations, and then show the films as input to the council. This topic came up during the focus group (pp. 169-170).

IV. Experiments with the size, structure, and length of the council

In several of the interviews, facilitators described situations where the council was larger than the original size of 12 to 15 participants, and instead included from 28 – 30 participants. Sometimes the facilitators responded by having an alternating combination of whole-group and small-group sessions throughout the council. Other times, the choice was to have two different groups working in parallel, whose work was then combined at the end. I learned that this can be a fraught process, especially if there is not enough time given to that consolidation. One facilitator described a variation where even though the group was the original size of 12-15 participants, the facilitators had participants work in two smaller groups of 6 or 7, during the two Dynamic Facilitation sessions on the first day. The intention was to offer participants more time to speak. Then on the second day, the facilitators worked with the group as a whole for another two sessions, before moving to the final recommendations.

Another facilitator, in describing briefly several *Bürgerräte* she had facilitated before choosing one to delve into in greater detail, mentioned a *Bürgerrat* in Munich that she was helping to facilitate. This council included 150 participants in 8 different simultaneous groups, so about 19 participants per group. The format was for participants to meet four times over the course of several months, for a full day each time. The first two sessions had been online, while the second two would be in person. Participants would be with their same group for 3 out of the 4 day-long sessions (the first two and the last one), while for the third session they would be taking part in a different grouping of participants.

This design seems like a hybrid between a Citizens' Assembly and a Citizens' Council. Another experimental feature is that by design, of the two facilitators assigned per group, one who was already trained in Dynamic Facilitation while the second one was not.

One last experiment that belongs in this category, is the experimentation that the governor's office in Salzburg did, with sponsoring some shorter *Bürgerräte* that were only one day in length (p. 141). It would be interesting to learn how participant experiences and outcomes in this "new kind of 'short *Bürgerrat*'" compare with the experiences and outcomes of the full 2-day model.

V. Experiments with introductory activities

After a formal welcome by the meeting sponsors, the Voralberg *Bürgerräte* have traditionally opened with a circle process, where participants are asked to speak to a question such as, "Where were you when you received the invitation to participate, and what led you to decide to come?" Facilitators sometimes include other warm-up activities as well.

Two warm-up activities that were mentioned in the interviews were both "mapping" activities. In one version, in a council where all of the participants lived in the same city,

facilitator had posted a city map on the wall, and then asked each person to place a pin on the map to show what part of the city they live in. In another version of a mapping activity, the facilitator invited participants to walk around the room, talk with one another, and situate themselves in the room according to their geographic proximity with one another.

There may be other activities that facilitators use as warm-ups for these councils. This was not an area I focused on in the interviews, so I am only noting here what came up spontaneously in the course of eliciting the narratives.

VI. Experiments with participatory evaluation of the results of a council

In one of the interviews, a facilitator described an embodied process she used so that participants could gain more insight on how the council had affected them. The initial portion of this process is mentioned on pages 123-125; I describe it more fully in Appendix D. Again, there may be other activities, similar or different, that facilitators have developed as closing activities for these councils. This could be a worthwhile area for inquiry.

VII. Experiments with the sponsorship of a council

In this last section, I am including two innovations. One is quite well-established at this point, although it was new to me. These are the councils that are sponsored by the Local Agenda 21 organizers as part of launching a new initiative. While different in some ways than the councils sponsored by municipal or state governments for the purpose of consultation, many of their features remain the same (pp. 130 - 134).

The second innovation is the first national-level *Bürgerrat* in Austria, which was sponsored by a coalition of non-profit organizations instead of by a government entity (the sponsorship of

this council is described on pp. 145-147). While similar in many respects to the government-sponsored councils, one key difference is that there was no formal “forum-system” link with an existing governmental entity. Thus, it was particularly interesting to learn that participants at this council, in response to the framing question of “How to improve democracy?” ended up re-inventing the original linked design (p. 152). This council is also an example that even in the absence of a formal “forum-system” link, a council can be a valuable learning opportunity for participants, organizers, and sponsors.

I will close this Appendix with a reminder that in the realm of group dynamics, even small changes can make a big difference. Of course we must continue to experiment, yet that is precisely why opportunities for ongoing reflection on our practice and our learning can be so valuable. It was very meaningful to hear from the various reflective practitioners whom I interviewed, that they found this a worthwhile opportunity for their own ongoing reflection. I am deeply grateful for their contributions to my own learning, and hope that our work together will be of benefit to others.

APPENDIX D

A Sociometric Process for the Closing Circle

This sociometric process was developed by Annemarie Felder, based on the work of Ruth Cohn on theme-centered interaction or TCI.[99]

1. Once the work of the council has concluded, people are asked to bring their chairs to form a circle. They are asked to stand in a circle, right in front of their chairs.
2. The facilitator places a card in the middle of the circle that stands for personal impact. The facilitator then asks the question, “What was your personal experience from this *Bürgerrat*? What degree of impact has this had on you, personally?
3. Participants are invited to walk in silence and stand in the place that represents their own response to this question. If their response is 100%, they walk all the way to the center of the circle, where the card is. If their response is 0%, they stay standing in front of their chair. If their response is somewhere in between, they take some steps to find the position that will indicate this.
4. Participants find their position in silence. Once they have done so, they are invited to look around, to see where others in the room in standing.
5. Then the facilitator invites anyone who wishes to do so, to say something about why they have chosen this place to stand.

[99] For more information on TCI, see Schneider-Landolf, Spielmann, and Zitterbarth, 2017.

6. When everyone who wishes to speak has spoken, participants are invited to return back to the outer circle and sit down.
7. Then the facilitator places another card in the middle of the circle. This card stands for "the issue". The facilitator asks the question: "How much have you learned about this issue?" Again, participants are asked to move in silence, and find a place to stand that corresponds to the degree of learning they have experienced, with regard to the issue that has been explored in the council.
8. After everyone has found their place, anyone who wishes to can speak. When all who wish to have spoken, they are invited to return to their seats in the circle.
9. The third and final card that the facilitator places in the center represents *Gemeinshaft*. The question is, "How much have you learned here, in connection with others here, that may influence what you will do, in the outside world, in your connections with others?
10. Again, everyone finds their place in silence, and then anyone who wishes to can speak. When all who wish to have spoken, everyone returns to their seats in the circle, and the sociometric process for the closing circle has concluded.

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