

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Involving Citizens in Crisis Management: A Case for Deliberation During Emergencies

Mikko Värttö 

This paper studies the role of public participation in the context of emergencies, such as pandemics. Two main challenges of democratic governance that can arise during acute crises are the uncertainty of information and the urgency of the situation. These challenges can lead to the technocratisation of emergency response and executive overreach that can undermine the democratic governance of a crisis. In response to this potential for the erosion of civil democracies in exceptional situations, this paper argues that the use of democratic innovations, such as public participation, should also be extended to exceptional circumstances to strengthen democratic governance in emergencies. The involvement of the general public in crisis management can generate a more efficient crisis response, build trust in public authorities, and increase public compliance. Moreover, public involvement during acute crises can increase communication between the official emergency response and citizens' preferences. Deliberative practices are especially suited for emergencies due to their capacity to reduce many of the inequalities in citizen groups. A further benefit of deliberative processes is that they can stimulate and support informed public opinion by putting structures into place that acknowledge common interests and long-term policy preferences. The analysis of deliberative mini-publics organised globally in connection to the COVID-19 pandemic show varying and novel responses to the challenges of responding to acute crises. These deliberative processes demonstrate how citizen groups and public authorities can contribute to both responsible and responsive governance during crisis situations.

Keywords: deliberative democracy; deliberative mini-public; COVID-19; pandemic; crisis

Introduction

Much of the literature on pandemic governance has focussed on technocratic tendencies and executive overreach during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bjornskov & Voigt 2022; Merkel & Lührmann 2021). These factors were shown to reduce the possibility for citizens to influence pandemic-related policies and also to undermine the democratic response to the crisis. For these reasons, a much-debated question has been whether the involvement of citizens in the planning of the emergency measures and policies could have prevented some of the failures and underachievement that occurred during the pandemic. Further questions have been raised about the possibility that increased public participation in the initial stages of pandemic could have laid the groundwork for more effective and socially accepted emergency measures and policies. Most importantly, this debate has drawn attention to the question of whether public involvement could have enabled an emergency response that may have considered the differing concerns and needs of the people.

The goal of this paper is to examine the role of public participation in the context of acute crises, often referred to as emergencies or disasters (Boin et al. 2016). Previous literature has mapped the terrain of various forms of public participation that have emerged during recent crises. Some of these contributions have focussed on social groups and movements that questioned emergency measures and policies, thus bringing attention to issues that have been previously neglected (Bringel & Pleyers 2022; Youngs 2023). Another study has shown how social groups and movements collaborated with public authorities to provide complementary services for people who are in need (Hall et al. 2021). Others have studied more informal networks of citizens formed in the aftermath of natural disasters (Curato 2019). However, few scholars have studied democratic innovations that took place during the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Lacelle-Webster et al. 2021).

This paper focuses mainly on a particular form of public participation in democratic innovation: deliberative mini-publics, which refer to institutions where a 'diverse body of citizens is selected randomly to reason together about an issue of public concern' (Smith & Setälä 2018). Research on deliberative mini-publics has increased extensively over

the last decades, and an increasing amount of evidence has emerged that shows their impact on participants' civic capacities and preferences on various issues (Grönlund, Setälä & Herne 2010; Grönlund et al. 2022; Strandberg & Berg 2020). Despite a few crucial exceptions (Dienel et al. 2024; Gastil et al. 2022; Muradova et al. 2023), the use of mini-publics in acute crises, which require swift reaction from the authorities, remains unacknowledged in the literature. This paper aims to fill this gap by discussing the potentials and shortcomings of deliberative mini-publics on a theoretical and empirical basis.

The paper progresses through four interlinked sections. The first section introduces the main challenges of democratic governance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, the main arguments for involving citizens in planning and decision-making regarding emergency measures and policies are outlined. The third section compares different democratic innovations, arguing that deliberative mini-publics may be best suited for emergencies due to their capacity to stimulate and support more enlightened and informed public opinion that acknowledges common interests and long-term policy preferences. Mini-publics can therefore contribute to a more responsible response to acute crises.

Finally, the article introduces some cases of deliberative mini-publics organised in Western countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The empirical part is based on an original database of 23 deliberative mini-publics organised during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results section lists key observations from the cases and compares their design choices. The findings illuminate some of the potentials and shortcomings of mini-publics and examines various design choices deployed by the organisers. These observations can help the organisers of the mini-publics to tackle the potential challenges under the conditions of pandemics and other abrupt emergencies.

Challenges of Democratic Governance During an Acute Crisis

The participative turn in public governance refers to different forms of direct and participatory democracy that emerged in the '60s and '70s as a response to a crisis of legitimacy in Western democracies. Decline in voter turnout and party membership, as well as decreased trust in democratic institutions, contributed to widespread scepticism of the legitimacy of the democratic political system. Public participation emerged as a response, and a shift in governance occurred, where citizens were given a chance to influence public policies directly, yet outside the realm of electoral democracy, with the hope that they could strengthen the overall legitimacy of the democratic political system. Since many of these new forms of public participation rely on the principles of deliberative democracy, some authors have argued for renaming this shift the deliberative turn, rather than participative turn (Dryzek 2000). Deliberative democracy represents a 'talk-centric' form of democracy (Chambers 2003) that gives deliberation a central place in political decision-making (Bächtiger et al. 2018).

Nowadays, participatory and deliberative forms of public participation are collectively called democratic innovations (Newton & Geissel 2012). Examples of democratic innovations include participatory budgeting, citizens' initiatives, deliberative mini-publics, and various forms of e-democracy. The interest in democratic innovations has grown steadily among academics and practitioners alike, and their benefits for public policy-making have been broadly acknowledged. Institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have urged member countries to take advantage of these institutions in an attempt to increase citizens' trust in democratic institutions (OECD 2020; 2021). Due to these investments in democratic cultivation, many of these democratic innovations have gained a more permanent status in the democratic political systems around the world.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in a systemic understanding of democratic innovations, and deliberative mini-publics in particular (Mansbridge et al. 2012; Smith & Setälä 2018). This systemic turn in democracy theory implies that, instead of studying single democratic innovations, scholars should explore the many connections between democratic innovations and the larger democratic system (Dean et al. 2020; Jäske & Setälä 2020). For example, whereas former democratic institutions relied mainly on the practices of representative democracy, recent democratic innovations can provide policy recommendations to politicians through deliberative mini-publics, participate in agenda-setting through citizens' initiatives, decide on public investments through participatory budgeting, and give feedback on public policies through various e-democracy platforms. In this way, participatory and deliberative forms of public participation are tightly embedded in the existing democratic political system.

Although democratic innovations have become a mainstay in current democratic political systems, the onset of an acute crisis can interrupt these practices. The first challenge to democratic governance during emergencies is related to the uncertainty of information. In an acute crisis, making informed choices becomes difficult due to uncertain and constantly changing information (Baekkeskov 2016; Fiske et al. 2023). During emergencies, misinformation about the situation may spread, and citizens may have difficulty verifying information. Especially in a serious health crisis, such as a pandemic, both citizens and politicians become dependent on authorities and experts and are willing to delegate decision-making authority to those individuals who they believe possess the best overall picture of the situation. Consequently, experts may monopolise the related public discourse and dampen dissenting voices related to emergency measures and policies (Baekkeskov & Öberg 2017). This trend is often characterised in literature as the technocratization of pandemic politics (Merkel & Lührmann 2021).

A second challenge of democratic governance during a crisis arises from the scarcity of time during emergencies. Democratic processes are often time-consuming and resource-demanding. Even in representative democracies, public policy cycles that develop from the policy planning

to policy implementation and evaluation stages can take years to materialise. However, emergencies can restrict the time available for policy preparation, since they demand governments to respond quickly to acute problems and challenges that originate from a crisis (Goetz 2014). For example, during a crisis, such as a pandemic, emergency response delays can lead to growing casualties and overburdening in the healthcare system. Therefore, politicians are often pushed to react quickly to the emergency by adopting measures and policies that would immediately restrict the spreading of the virus and thus help the healthcare system to cope with the exceptional circumstances.

Indeed, the literature on emergency response during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that, despite few exceptions (Engler et al. 2021), many governments quickly adopted emergency laws and provisions that allowed them to restrict many basic rights and liberties of the citizens (Björnskov & Voigt 2022). These measures were often adopted without broad debates in the national parliaments. The normal proceedings of the national parliaments were, in many cases, temporarily suspended or restricted during the pandemic (Chiru 2024). Also, expert hearings and consultation rounds were often conducted more quickly than usual or were sidelined altogether (Värtö 2024). For these reasons, many scholars have blamed the national governments for executive overreach during the pandemic (e.g., Björnskov & Voigt 2022).

To conclude, emergency conditions may lead to a paradox where knowledge about the situation is more critical than ever, but the information is uncertain and constantly changing. Simultaneously, although the careful consideration of different viewpoints is central to effective and socially sustainable emergency measures and policies, less time is available for democratic processes in a crisis. These challenges were exacerbated in the context of COVID-19, where governments were faced with the difficulty of choosing emergency measures and policies that would prevent the spread of the virus, but which would also keep the primary operations of democratic society functioning. The next chapter discusses whether democratic innovations would have helped governments to solve these paradoxes in a crisis, or if having them represents a form of 'luxury', as Fung (2021) questions.

Rationales for Public Engagement During a Crisis

Despite these challenges of democratic governance during a crisis, there are many reasons for engaging citizens in planning and deciding emergency measures and policies. The first reason for public participation during emergencies is that it can help to increase public acceptance and compliance with the emergency response (Fung 2021). When citizens have a say in emergency measures and policies, they are more willing to accept and follow them (Mouter et al. 2021). In this sense, when they involve citizens in crisis management, participatory and deliberative processes can potentially increase democratic legitimacy and counterbalance technocratic tendencies in a state of crisis.

Public compliance with emergency measures depends on trust judgements. Empirically, the link between trust and public compliance with emergency measures is well-documented in the research literature (see Devine et al. 2021). However, the mechanisms of trust are not as well acknowledged. Warren and Gastil (2015) distinguish between four kinds of trust in the political system. These include (1) trust in experts and professionals, (2) trust in public institutions, (3) trust in political representatives, and (4) trust in information proxies that facilitate citizen judgements. The fourth kind of trust, which authors call *facilitative trust*, is most cognitively demanding of citizens since it requires them to make trust judgements based on distilled information provided by various information sources, such as news media.

As was witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the citizens' trust in experts and politicians remained relatively high during the initial phase of the pandemic. This high trust in authorities could be explained by the 'rally round the flag' phenomena often witnessed in emergencies (Devine et al. 2021). Citizens who strongly support public authorities in an acute crisis may be more willing to comply with emergency measures and policies (Bol et al. 2021). However, when the most acute phase of the crisis ends, there might be room for criticism. For instance, critical voices towards the emergency response and signs of distrust in authorities began to surface during the latter phase of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bengtsson & Brommesson 2022). Therefore, especially towards the end of the crisis, a more open and engaging form of crisis management where citizens are involved in planning and deciding emergency measures and policies may help to sustain trust in public authorities and also to maintain public compliance with the extended emergency measures and policies.

The second reason for public participation during emergencies is that it can help to harness the general public's collective intelligence. By hearing the citizens, local communities, and civic actors, the public authorities can better understand how the general public weighs pandemic policy decisions (Mouter et al. 2021). Although decision-making can be primarily based on expert knowledge in the sciences and policy processes, the evaluation of different policy choices may benefit from the local knowledge of those particularly affected by the decisions (Christiano 2012: 27). Based on the citizens' feedback on the policies and measures, the government can modify its current policies or begin planning policies to better correspond with citizens' preferences and interests. Also, citizens' involvement may lead to more context relevant and culturally sensitive measures.

Effective crisis management can benefit from the public engagement in different crisis stages (Parry, Asenbaum & Ercan 2020). In the pre-crisis stage, participatory processes can help the public authorities identify and anticipate potential crises and lay the ground for preparation plans. During the crisis, the involvement of citizens in emergency response can create feedback loops between citizens and authorities, which may be beneficial for spreading timely and accurate information, fighting against misinformation,

and collecting feedback on emergency measures and policies. In the post-crisis stage, the public authorities may benefit from involving citizens in evaluating emergency measures and policies and identifying possible weaknesses and failures. These assessments can increase the preparedness for future challenges and build long-term societal resilience to withstand potential crises.

Although research literature acknowledges two of the mentioned rationales for public engagement during a crisis, the final rationale is less studied and relates to *the responsiveness of electoral democracy*. According to May (1978), the responsive rule refers to a 'necessary correspondence between acts of governance and the desires concerning those acts of the persons who are affected'. In an electoral democracy, ideally, citizens vote for political candidates they believe would be best suited for the position and they advocate for the political issues they consider most important. The effect of this, is that the responsiveness of politics is evaluated in every election, where voting functions as a measurable response to governance. Citizens engage, or correspond, with government, by either voting for the incumbent official or voting for an alternative candidate.

Some scholars have argued that responsiveness in politics has degenerated during past decades due to increased international collaboration and concerns over collective challenges, such as financial crises (Bardi et al. 2014). Because of the binding effect of international agreements and growing attention to global challenges, national governments have less room to manoeuvre to impact public policies. For example, consideration of long-term challenges, such as climate change, requires governments to pay attention to the extended consequences of their current decisions and policies, as well as the possible desires and requirements of future generations (Goetz 2014). These additional demands may undermine the government's ability to correspond to the immediate preferences of the people.

Numerous possible institutional mechanisms have been developed to tackle the lack of responsiveness in political systems. Among the proposed mechanisms are frequent elections, short electoral terms, direct election of officials, the possibility of recall of representatives, imperative mandates, intra-party democracy, and open primaries (Lagerspetz 2023). Also, the use of different forms of democratic innovations can respond to the lack of responsiveness in the political system. As Warren (2009: 11) argues: 'more citizen participation, more government responsiveness'. Or, as Fung (2015: 520) says: 'When participatory governance reforms successfully incorporate people or views that were previously excluded, this can increase equality by enabling them to advocate more effectively for goods and services, rights, status, and authority. // That responsiveness, in turn, may generate a more just allocation of the benefits and burdens of public policy.'

The idea that democratic innovations can contribute to more responsive politics aligns with a systemic understanding of democratic governance. From this perspective, direct, participatory, and deliberative methods allow politicians to hear the citizens' perspectives

during the electoral term, thus potentially increasing responsiveness in electoral democracy (Grönlund et al. 2014). Within these parameters, this means that democratic innovations could be merged within the democratic system to respond to the observed weaknesses and challenges of the electoral democracy. For example, one notable weakness is the exclusion of minorities and marginalised groups of people from participation in the democratic process. To increase the representativeness of these demographics in democratic processes, scholars have proposed participant selection methods – such as sortition, selective random sampling, targeted selection, and proportional representation – to bring minority perspectives into the decision-making processes.

However, some authors have questioned whether full responsiveness can ever be reached. Firstly, it is impossible, from a practical standpoint, to respond to every citizen's preferences (Lagerspetz 2023: 45). Especially in large societies, political disagreement is omnipresent, and citizens' preferences are likely to contradict in many respects. Therefore, policies cannot perfectly correspond with the preferences of all citizens, as the normative assumption of responsive politics implies. Secondly, citizens' preferences may not be consistent over time and may change when citizens reconsider their priorities or adapt to external circumstances (Lagerspetz 2023: 46). It is widely held assumption that people tend to focus on short-term interests rather than long-term policy preferences (Rapeli et al. 2021). This shortsightedness may explain why most citizens are reluctant, for example, to reduce spending and consumption, or to shift to sustainable alternatives to mitigate climate change.

During an acute crisis, such as a pandemic, responsive politics becomes even more difficult because governments must react immediately to problems and challenges with no opportunity for public engagement. Additionally, since more attention is paid to the emergency response, other important political issues may lose their immediate relevance and be dropped from the political agenda. In the example of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments adapted their political agendas according to the immediate issue of the pandemic, necessitating significant changes and workarounds (Knill & Steinebach 2022). One result of this focus was the synchronisation of policies between EU member states (Immonen et al. 2024). This example shows the paradox of effective response to a crisis situation in the context contemporary globalized politics: on one hand, there is a benefit from collaborating with EU nations, but on the other hand, governments' capacities to advance national interests become undermined. The challenges of the responsive rule are discussed further in the following chapter, which compares different forms of public engagement during a crisis.

Forms of Public Engagement During a State of Crisis

In the face of challenges during an emergency, such as time constraints and unclear information, a general evaluation of the possibilities and challenges of different forms of public engagement can be made. Due to their basic characteristics, some democratic innovations are

more suited for emergencies than others. For example, direct and participatory forms of democratic practices are less time-intensive than deliberative methods, and thus, they can be implemented more quickly. These direct forms of participation, which often rely on new digital technologies and platforms (see Lacelle-Webster et al. 2021), require participants to acquire information and learn about the issues they decide on. However, during a crisis, participants rarely have time, time, resources, or motivation to thoroughly understand the issues at hand. Thus, rumours and false information may affect the participatory processes more than deliberative processes.

Although they are highly time-intensive and demand similar, or even more, knowledge resources than direct and participative practices, deliberative methods of public participation are preferential in crisis situations. With respect to knowledge resources, deliberative methods differ from other methods due to their educative characteristic. When citizens participate in deliberative mini-publics, they can learn from experts and other participants who may hold different values and beliefs and who may possess expert knowledge. Therefore, deliberative processes can alleviate disparities in prior knowledge resources between participants and also help to lower the epistemic barriers between lay citizens and experts (Estlund & Landemore 2018; Landemore 2012).

An extensive body of research has documented changes in participants' preferences in deliberative events (e.g., Knobloch et al. 2013; Strandberg & Berg 2020). Although participants begin as ordinary citizens, education and deliberation about issues exposes them to diverse viewpoints and can create expertise that eventually distances their opinions from those of the general public (Pearse 2008). Similar changes in participants' opinions regarding crisis measures have been documented in the recent COVID-19 related mini-publics (Dienel et al. 2024; Leino et al. 2022).

Researchers have also observed significant changes in participants' knowledge levels after taking part in deliberative mini-publics (Andersen & Hansen 2007; Himmelroos & Rapeli 2020). These findings indicate that expertise can act as an external filter in deliberative processes, as a means to rule out misperceptions and prejudices as possible bases of policy-making to facilitate decisions based on facts (Christiano 2012). Therefore, deliberative mini-publics could also be utilised to combat disinformation in exceptional circumstances. Moreover, the effects of mini-publics can extend beyond time-based deliberations. Results from a recent experiment show that mini-public endorsement can also significantly increase the uptake of expert information among nonparticipating citizens (Muradova et al. 2023).

In the way that it incorporates citizens into expert discussion, deliberative methods can also respond to criticisms of responsive politics, that citizens' perspectives are too diverse for consensus and that they consider only short-term solutions. Firstly, instead of aggregating different viewpoints, deliberation aims to go beyond self-interest by seeking common interests and building consensus. With respect to self-interest, the most important institutional feature of deliberative mini-publics is their

selection process through random sampling that aims to capture the full demographic variation of the relevant population (Warren & Gastil 2015). In this sense, the participants of the mini-publics should represent a range of interests and perspectives of the wider public, and not just those of the most privileged groups, who are also often the most politically active members of society.

Regarding the correspondence between public policies and citizens' desires, deliberative practices can lead to policies that are more widely supported by the general public. In a deliberative process, participants base their preferences on scientific evidence and weighted views instead of gut feelings. Therefore, deliberative methods can give us an idea of the (enlightened) collective will of the people (Landemore 2012). In this sense, deliberation can enhance our understanding of the interests of all the members of society and how to advance those interests in a just and equitable way to make good collective decisions (Christiano 2012: 27).

Deliberative mini-publics can also have beneficial effects on the capabilities, attitudes, and behaviours, not only of participants but also of citizens in the wider public (Gastil et al. 2023; Knobloch et al. 2020; Már & Gastil 2020; Muradova et al. 2023; Setälä et al. 2023). The idea behind this spill-over effect is that deliberative mini-publics can act as trusted information proxies for citizens in the wider public (Warren & Gastil 2015). Regardless of their personal views on the matter, people may be more likely have more trust in information and comply with complex political outcomes if these outcomes were the result of deliberative processes involving lay citizens or 'others like me' (Pow et al. 2020).

Finally, with respect to the general tendency of citizens to over-evaluate the short-term benefit over the long-term benefit of public policies, deliberative practices have the potential to advance more future-oriented policies and thus to generate more future-oriented perspectives. Therefore, deliberation can decrease myopia (shortsightedness) in the political processes to facilitate more sustainable policies in the long term. In recent years, scholars have proposed methods, such as 'statistical victims' (Landwehr 2023) or 'mental time-travelling' (Leino & Kulha 2023), to draw attention to potential future harms, thus bringing future generations' perspectives into deliberations to advance a sense of intergenerational justice.

By provoking participants to consider the interests and preferences of those not attending deliberative mini-publics, deliberative processes can extend participants' views outside their individual self-interests and short-term preferences. This consideration should also include future generations who cannot participate in decision-making but who will be burdened by their long-term consequences. Through this extension of scope, deliberative mini-publics can increase responsible forms of responsiveness. In the context of this study, *responsible responsiveness* refers to the *correspondence between acts of governance and the weighted interests and preferences of the affected persons*, distinguished from May's (1978) original definition of responsiveness. Applying this principle in public policy-making would require mechanisms that educate and

encourage citizens to consider different viewpoints before they engage in collective will formation.

Deliberative Mini-Publics During the COVID-19 Pandemic

To study what roles deliberative mini-publics can play in acute crises, such as pandemics, an original database of 23 COVID-19 pandemic-related deliberative mini-public cases was collected (see Appendix). To date, few studies have investigated these cases in any systematic way. However, information about these deliberative events was found from organisers' reports, news articles, open platforms Buergererrat, International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD), and Participedia.net. First, these documents were analysed to gather information regarding the number of participants, participant type, selection method, role of experts, influence, and key observations of each case. All of the selected cases share the key elements of deliberative mini-publics regarding the participant selection method, expert hearings, and facilitated group discussions (Harris 2019). Due to the restrictions on movements and social gatherings during the pandemic, all cases were organised either fully or partially online.

All of the cases were organised in Western countries in 2020–2022 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The collection highlights the richness of deliberative events. Outside the ideal type of deliberative mini-publics, such as citizens' juries and deliberative polls (see Elstub 2014), a field of deliberative mini-publics also emerged that varies in many regards, including the composition of the participants (citizens only or mixed); selection methods (random selection, stratified random selection, or targeted selection); and duration (defined, repeated, or permanent). The core features of the deliberative mini-publics still include the selection method via stratified random sampling, hearing of experts, and facilitated group discussions.

Despite the lack of academic research on the cases, the organisers of these deliberative events often collected information about the events and their results. The most important findings from the deliberative mini-publics during the COVID-19 pandemic are that citizens can and will discuss controversial and complex issues (Dienel et al. 2024). For example, one study showed that, despite personal struggles with COVID-19 and ideological differences, participants in mini-publics can take their responsibility seriously and work together respectfully (Gastil et al. 2022). Along the same lines, another study found that deliberation can provide good circumstances for learning and scrutinising public policy proposals (Leino et al. 2022). Together, these findings support the idea that deliberative mini-publics can be used in acute crises, such as pandemics, to bring together groups of citizens who can inform emergency measures and policies in a productive manner.

However, the actual impact of deliberative mini-publics on influencing policy remains unclear in the literature. Therefore, this present study seeks to analyse these mini-public cases formed during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) to evaluate how design choices

of the deliberative mini-publics reflect different ways of responding to the challenges of acute crises. Design choices include agenda setting, the role of expertise, and the mode of the deliberative process in the context of emergency situations where unclear information, extreme polarisation and urgency are factors in interaction between citizens' groups and public authorities.

One of the key design choices for organisers of the deliberative mini-publics concerns during an acute crisis is related to framing concerns and expertise. Extensive studies have shown that the field of expertise of the experts invited to the deliberative event can affect the participants' perceptions of the integrity and impartiality of the process (e.g. Drury et al. 2021). However, many relevant factors should be considered when discussing emergency measures and policies, not just expert views, especially in complex, controversial, and emotionally loaded issues such as the pandemic. The cases show instances where attempts were made to avoid the potential harmful effects of biased information during a deliberative process. For example, in the Bristol case, the choice of experts was outsourced to an impartial body, or steering group, which functioned as an independent advisory board consisting of a variety of representatives of different interest groups, authorities, experts, or citizens (City of Bristol 2021).

Another way to limit intentional bias in the selection of experts is to ask the participants of the mini-public to choose the experts. For example, in North Macedonia, the members of the citizens' assembly were asked to identify experts they trusted to reach a decision (ZIP Institute 2020). This approach was taken because public scepticism about experts and extreme views existed. The findings from the North Macedonian case suggest that experts chosen by citizen groups may have helped to moderate extreme views, while also reinforcing the impartiality of the process. In Turku, the organisers used an interactive mode where the participants could craft questions for the experts to receive answers to precisely the questions they had in mind (Leino et al. 2022). This mode of communication can potentially prevent the field of expertise from framing the deliberative event to the extent that is harmful to the process.

There are also cases where the experts were invited to deliberate with the citizens on an equal footing. This practice would allow experts to interact with lay citizens to provide evidence and explanations for their views. In Augsburg, Germany, the COVID-19 Citizens' Advisory Council met once a month to discuss the issues and challenges that arose as a result of COVID-19 and to develop solutions for them (Innovation in Politics Institute 2021). The council consisted of ten citizens, the mayor, five council members, and six experts from the city administration. During the meetings, the experts could respond to citizens' questions, and questions not clarified in the meeting were forwarded to the responsible city administration department.

In an interesting example in Camden, UK, another form of expert knowledge in the case studies originated from citizens' groups. In the Camden Health and Care Citizens' Assembly, the participants worked as 'citizen scientists'

to investigate the effects of COVID-19 on individuals and local communities before they engaged in the deliberative process (Kaleidoscope Health and Care 2020). This case illustrates how local knowledge and experiences can be pooled to build more locally tailored responses. Moreover, by empowering citizen groups to engage in the discovery process, this process may help citizens to avoid becoming too dependent on expert information by inviting them to take on the role of experts themselves.

Time and place are also features of design choice that can impact the outcome of deliberative mini-publics. The deliberative process can be time-consuming and costly, especially for members of the public. In the cases, various methods to streamline deliberative processes to save resources and to bolster participation are illustrated. The first method was the organisation of meetings online or in hybrid form, which combined both online and face-to-face participation. This may indicate that a chance to participate online is a prerequisite for successful deliberation in an acute crisis where face-to-face meetings are restricted. In addition, lighter participatory formats, such as kitchen table discussions and virtual conversation cafes can complement formal deliberative events. An interesting experiment in UK called #LockDownDebate provides insights of how new technologies could be utilised to run online deliberative processes during times of crisis (Ada Lovelace Institute 2020).

A second way to streamline deliberative processes is to consult permanent citizens' panels, consisting of a standing group of citizens whose participants are selected from a larger pool of potential candidates or volunteers. Using these candidate recruitment methods can save resources from participant recruitment, often the most time-consuming characteristic of deliberative mini-publics. For example, in Augsburg, Germany, the COVID-19 Citizens' Advisory Council met once a month for a period of half a year. After three months, the advisory board was reconstituted by selecting the participants from a pool of candidates who had expressed interest in joining the council. Permanent panels allow citizen participants more time and resources to consider relevant information, and they also help to decrease the organizational burden at the administrative level.

To conclude, the design choices regarding the role of expertise and the mode of the deliberative process manifest different ways of responding to the challenges of acute emergencies where unclear information, extreme polarisation and urgency prevail. Although this analysis only concerned deliberative mini-publics organised in connection to the COVID-19 pandemic, the design choices of the mini-publics could also be extended to other contexts that share similar conditions. Naturally, these findings are not exclusive to only emergencies, but may also provide insights for organisers of deliberative mini-publics that engage citizens in the issues of public concern during regular times.

Discussion

This article studied the role of public participation in emergencies, such as pandemics. When responding

to a crisis, governments seek to adopt policies that prevent some of its harms and support a quick recovery from a crisis. However, these emergency measures and policies often require trade-offs between values, such as individual rights, liberties, and societal well-being. A recovery from a crisis would require careful consideration of these values and how to materialise them. To find the right balance between different values, authorities would benefit from a more comprehensive public involvement that would provide insights into citizens' preferences and interests.

However, simply asking citizens their opinions may not lead to responsible policies if they are misguided or self-interested. Therefore, citizens' understanding of the crisis circumstances and potential ways out of the crisis should be developed when they are involved in crisis management. Deliberative mini-publics, in particular, have the potential to expand citizens' outlook to include broad perspectives and future considerations. In this respect, deliberative mini-publics have the potential to cross the divide between responsible and responsive politics. Thus, in an acute crisis, it can be argued that deliberation can advance a form of *responsible responsiveness* that recognises the demand for difficult political decisions and addresses the consequences of the policies for the wider population, including future generations.

The final part of the article introduced findings from the deliberative mini-publics organised in connection with the recent health crisis. Due to the small number of cases, it is impossible to generalise the conclusions of these mini-publics. However, the analysis highlights the potentials and shortcomings of deliberative mini-publics during an acute crisis, such as a pandemic. Findings from the recent pandemic-related mini-publics reveal how particular design choices can respond to the challenges of an acute crisis. With future research on deliberative mini-publics, it may become possible to analyse how certain design choices relate to post-deliberation evaluations of the deliberative process, the changes in their opinions, and the influence of the citizens' recommendations. This knowledge could then be used to design deliberative events that are more effective, responsive, and democratic, even during an acute crisis.

Future research could also consider how deliberative mini-publics function in the context of other types of crises or even under the conditions of a poly-crisis, which is characterised by the co-existence of multiple global crises that may reinforce each other and make finding the solutions more demanding (Lawrence et al. 2024). In the context of a poly-crisis, the deliberative mini-publics would not only offer solutions to specific crises but could also acknowledge the connections and dependencies between different types of co-existing crises. This is certainly not a simple task, but in these current times of democratic backsliding, we should retain our trust in democratic institutions and reinforce them to withstand the challenge of authoritarian and populist leaders who propose simple solutions to complex problems.

Appendix

Table: COVID-19 related deliberative mini-publics organised during the pandemic.

Name	Country	Year(s)	Online or offline
<i>Deliberative Consultation on Trade-offs Related to Using 'COVIDSafe' Contact Tracing Technology</i>	Australia	2020	Online
<i>COVID-19 Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Community Forums, South Australia</i>	Australia	2020	Online
<i>Citizens' Assembly on Restrictions and Recommendations in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic</i>	Finland	2021	Online
<i>Online session of the Citizens' Convention on Climate: Finding a way out of the COVID-19 Crisis</i>	France	2020	Online
<i>The City of Grenoble's COVID-19 Citizen Convention</i>	France	2020–2021	Both
<i>Citizens' Council, Nantes</i>	France	2020–2021	Online
<i>Citizens' Committee</i>	France	2021	Online
<i>Thuringian Citizens' Forum: Common Ways to Address COVID-19 and Future Pandemics</i>	Germany	2021	Both
<i>The COVID-19 Citizens' Advisory Council, Augsburg</i>	Germany	2020–2021	Both
<i>Citizens' Forum COVID-19, Baden-Württemberg</i>	Germany	2020–2021	Online
<i>Forum COVID-19, Saxony</i>	Germany	2021–2022	Online
<i>Conference on the Future of Europe</i>	International	2021–2022	Both
<i>Citizens' Assembly, North Macedonia</i>	North Macedonia	2021	Online
<i>Climate Assembly UK and the COVID-19 Crisis</i>	UK	2020	Both
<i>#LockDownDebate: Rapid Online Deliberation on Contact Tracing</i>	UK	2020	Online
<i>Citizens' Panel: Planning the West Midlands' Recovery</i>	UK	2020	Online
<i>Dialogue and Deliberative Workshops on COVID-19</i>	UK	2020	Online
<i>Online Public Dialogues on COVID-19 Winter Preparedness</i>	UK	2020	Online
<i>Your City Our Future, Bristol</i>	UK	2020	Both
<i>Camden Health and Care Citizens' Assembly</i>	UK	2020	Both
<i>Scottish Parliament Citizens' Panel on COVID-19</i>	UK	2021	Online
<i>Connecting to Congress Online Town Halls on the COVID-19 Emergency</i>	US	2020	Online
<i>Oregon Citizens' Assembly on COVID-19 Recovery</i>	US	2020	Online

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