Results of the Academic Citizens' Assembly - MYBLUEPLANET 2023

This report summarizes the process, results, and insights of the [Academic Citizens' Assembly](#) (ACA) organized by [MYBLUEPLANET](#) (MBP), with support from the [Climate Reality Project Europe](#), on Wednesday 26.04.2023 in Lausanne.

21st century democratic decision-making for the Swiss societal transition.

1. Context and goals

The **Academic Citizens' Assembly – MYBLUEPLANET** (ACA MBP 2023) took place on Wednesday 26.04.2023 at the Impact Hub Lausanne in Beaulieu, on the topic of "How to organize Lausanne 2030 for energy sufficiency?", with two distinct goals:

● Identify promising proposals on the urgent and essential topic of local action for sufficiency, supported by a supermajority (>70%) of participants
● Understand which sufficiency actions are intuitively acceptable to a general audience, not having invested much time working on this topic

Since the 1980s, citizens' assemblies have been successfully conducted dozens of times in many countries, almost always leading to recommendations of high quality. Most assemblies had between 20 and 150 participants, and the main challenge was acting on the result by the government, parliament, or popular referendum. To overcome this issue, the Academic Citizens' Assembly (ACA) is specifically designed to scale to hundreds of thousands of participants, building on the Swiss tradition of participatory direct democracy.

ACA is entirely based on academic principles: evidence-based, lobby-free, no ideology. In contrast to many assemblies, interest groups do not get a special platform to defend their "interests" during the preparation phase, which is limited to science-based information.

Citizens' assemblies ensure representativity by a process called "stratified sortition", where participants are randomly selected to maintain a representative proportion of all subgroups considered significant, such as age, gender, education, and sometimes nationality, income, size of city, political views or other. In contrast, the ACA is designed to be representative by full inclusion. ACA MBP 2023 was not representative of the broader society, as participants were self-selected from the broader MBP and Impact Hub communities.

The main partners of the Academic Citizens' Assembly are Business School Lausanne (BSL) and EPFL, supported by CLIMACT and E4S.

2. Structure, process, and tools

ACA MBP 2023 was a one-session, 3-hour mini-assembly, in the Circularium space of Impact Hub Lausanne in Beaulieu. The group deliberation and proposal writing took place in fixed groups, while voting was individual and anonymous. Each group was seated at its own table in the hall. The assembly took place on Wednesday 26.04.2023, 14-18h. This included a welcome, a presentation and discussion on energy and sufficiency, group formation, one hour of deliberation, and the summary and restitution of preliminary results.

Each group had a volunteer facilitator (to ensure respect, inclusion, focused participation, and output, within the scheduled time) and observer (to note each group's social dynamic). Both facilitators and observers could participate in the deliberation and vote, in addition to their roles.

ACA MBP 2023 was the second short, one-session ACA we organized, and the first one with a general audience. This ACA included a one-hour learning session (presentation and discussion), this could only cover the basics of energy and sufficiency, and one session is really short to start producing proposals on this complex topic.

Access to all needed tools (opening form, team documents, proposal voting software - pol.is, and the closing survey) was provided in a "Tools" section on the ACA MBP 2023 page of the ACA website. It could be accessed on any device including mobile phones, but laptops were generally used for typing proposals and observer notes.

3. Participation - surveys, statistics, observers

ACA MBP 2023 had a total of **31 participants in 4 groups**, 7-9 per group.

A total of **23 proposals** were submitted, **633 votes** cast.

The **Participant Survey**, based on 24 replies (77% response rate), focused on the process of the ACA and the satisfaction with various aspects of organization, as well as feedback for future improvement.

The survey was included in the process, resulting in a high response rate.

Participants were 58% female, 42% male; covering a broad range of roles and professions: engaged citizens, students, entrepreneurs, educators, public officials, professionals, engineers, researchers, and journalists.

Main stated **motivations around energy and sufficiency**: stopping climate change, promoting sustainability, taking responsibility, innovation, education, and concern for future generations' well-being, but also reflecting, learning, and connecting with others.

Level of **prior knowledge**, self-declared: range 1-10, average 6.6, mode 8

Emotions associated with sufficiency: neutrality, positivity, hopefulness, joy, freedom, conscientiousness, contentment, satisfaction, security, stress, and a mix of hope and disappointment.

Here is a summary of **sufficiency measures already practiced** by participants: reducing heating, limiting air travel and car use, eating less meat, recycling, growing own herbs, buying local and second-hand, and making conscious decisions when purchasing.

However, **practicing sufficiency is hard**, according to our participants, due to financial costs, need for lifestyle changes, limitations on travel and food choices, challenges in influencing others, and the complexities of the global economy and political system.

Organization of the ACA: inclusion and respect were very high (range of votes 0-10, "mode" is most common reply)
- Overall organization: average 8, mode 8 (54% of votes)
- "Was the goal of the ACA clear to you?": average 8.1, mode 8
- "Was the process of the ACA clear to you?", average 8.5, modes 8 and 10 (33% each)
- "Did the voting work well?", average 8.1, mode 10 (46%)
- "Could you express yourself, and were you heard?", average 9.2, mode 10 (58%)
- "Were you treated with respect?", average 9.6, mode 10 (79%)
- "Quality of discussion?", average 8.5, mode 10 (42%)
- "Quality of proposals?", range 3-10, average 7.1, mode 8 (33%)
- People reported positive feelings: energized, engaged, happy, thankful, excited, interested
- Several people though more time would have been beneficial
- Group size (7-9 people) was considered good or perfect in all responses

An analysis of all four **observers' sheets** (4 groups, 1 session, total 4 sessions) indicates good quality of discussions:

- The atmosphere was relaxed 75%, mixed 25%, tense 0%
- Soft power prevailed 75% (50% rather, 25% clearly), hard power prevailed 25% (25% rather, 0% clearly)
- Symmetry of the discussions during the session (participants treated each other as equals): 100% (75% very symmetric, 25% symmetric)
- Participants were open to change positions 100% of the time (generally 75%, always 25%)
    - Noteworthy observation: the only female group was the most open
- Participants provided justifications for their claims: mostly 100%
- Reciprocity (referring to others' positions): high 75%, medium 25%
- Active participation: >90%, similar for male and female participants
- Facilitators provided active facilitation 75% of the time, passive 25%
- No polarization was observed or reported

4. Voting results: accepted proposals

Out of the total 23 proposals submitted, below are the top proposals reaching **>70% support**, edited for clarity:

Focus: Education-Buildings-Agriculture+Food-Transport+Urban Planning

>90%

1. Mandatory sustainability courses for all elected officials

2. Replace high fossil energy use heating in old buildings

>85%

3. Make public transport accessible for bikes

>80%

4. More comprehensive sustainability education for everyone, obligatory at all levels

5. Roof greening mandatory for new buildings, incentives for existing buildings

6. Incentivize remote work for companies in the tertiary sector

>70%

7. Product label to make buyers aware of the adverse effects of their actions

8. Pop-up truck shops for fresh food in local neighborhoods

9. Expand public transports in Lausanne to reduce needs of car

10. Tax on energy-inefficient cars to fund public transport

5. Discussion - insights and learnings

What can we conclude about the effectiveness and the outcome of the ACA MBP 2023?

Motivation, energy, engagement: Based on the participant survey, feedback emails, and numerous discussions, the level of engagement and energy in the assembly was very high, with most participants expressing a feeling of joy, engagement, accomplishment, and motivation to support this democratic process.

Process and organization: ACA MBP 2023 largely integrated the learnings and insights of the first three assemblies (ACA 2021, ACA 2022, ACA K3 2022), the organization was almost flawless, all tools worked as planned, and the process was well structured. People felt heard, respected, and the whole process was well documented by the observers and the closing survey of participants. On the basis of this and the previous point, we conclude that the process and tools worked well.

Quality and implementability of proposals: While the retained proposals are meaningful and somewhat innovative, especially #1-4-5-8 (sustainability education, roof greening, pop-up fresh food shops), all lack specificity needed for implementation, such as time-frame, who acts or who pays. Given the short time, this is inevitable; perhaps a two-session process could first define the focus and then implementation. Especially the mobility proposals (#3-6-9-10) are too general to be useful.

Ignored examples: In the introduction session, participants were given three examples, to use as inspiration or build upon, if they wished. It is interesting that none of the elements of the examples were developed in the proposals, nor did they serve to elevate the level of ambition of the deliberation. Provided examples:

- Ensure local provisioning of food, health and child care, basic repair services, social and admin support, and co-working.
- Close neighborhood streets for cars, except emergency services. Use slow electric carts for deliveries.
- Cover main pedestrian pathways city-wide with plant-covered roofs to protect against rain, snow, heat, and filter air pollution.

Level of ambition: This is the biggest limitation of the assembly, reflecting the complexity of the sufficiency topic, the limited time of the preparation phase, and the difficulty of most participants to imagine a different future. Even if the proposals were properly defined and fully implemented, their collective impact would be a tiny fraction of what is needed. No serious attempt was made to restrict the high consumption of mobility, floor space, heating, or general consumption. Our main challenge is precisely how to do this at a societal level, while ensuring high wellbeing. To meet this challenge, a future ACA will need a suitable preparation, perhaps a facilitation more oriented towards high-impact proposals, and more sessions, perhaps to progressively increase ambition.

General vs. specialized audience: When it comes to specialized topics like sufficiency policy, a specialist audience can quickly engage in effective deliberation, as long as the objectives and process are well-defined. However, it takes a general audience much longer to reach a consensus. The outcomes of the last three assemblies, including ACA 2022 (general audience, three sessions), ACA K3 2022 (specialist audience, one session), and ACA MBP 2023 (general audience, one session), highlight the importance of preparation and time allocation. While ACA 2022 was able to converge on ambitious proposals after a separate preparatory session and three deliberation sessions, ACA K3 2022 was effective with little preparation and only one session, as it was linked to participants' daily work. ACA MBP 2023, despite being better organized based on past experience, was constrained by the short time allowing a single session. More preparation and at least two sessions could have resulted in more ambitious and precise proposals.

6. Next steps

To build on the momentum and learnings of the ACA MBP 2023, we propose the following next steps:

- Share this report with participants, academia, public administrations, journalists, social media
- Outreach to cities, communes, cantons to adapt a future assembly to their context and language
- Integration in scientific research as a way to better engage citizens
- Include a similar workshop in the 2024 K3 Kongress zu Klimakommunikation in Graz, 18-19.09.2024
- Exchange experience with other deliberative democracy initiatives

7. Supplementary material

All proposals and detailed results of all votes are available in the Annex.
Please contact us for any additional information or exchange.

8. Photos and impressions