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11 Citizens' assemblies: Top-down or bottom-up? – both, please!

Abstract: This chapter provides a critical reflection on conceptualizations of top-down and bottom-up citizens' assemblies (CAs). Through a review of the literature and analysis of paradigmatic examples we identify main characteristics of each ideal type. Ideal-type top-down assemblies are opened by state institutions to address a predefined policy issue and strengthen the legitimacy of the commissioning body. Ideal-type bottom-up assemblies are led by civil society, provide space for citizen agenda-setting and might have ambitions for more radical reform projects but struggle to have tangible impact because of looser or no links with centres of power. However, the practice of CAs is less clear-cut: bottom-up approaches are not always better at ensuring more inclusive processes, and top-down CAs do not seem to have such a good record in terms of impact just because they work closely with state institutions. Our assessment of four different dimensions of the top-down/bottom-up heuristic allows for a more differentiated assessment of types of CAs that may also flexibly combine bottom-up and top-down elements.

Keywords: deliberative democracy, participatory democracy, citizens' assembly, institutional design, civil society, social movements, democratic legitimacy, constitutional reform, governance-driven democratization, democracy-driven governance

11.1 Introduction

The debate over top-down (Fishkin 2009) versus bottom-up approaches (Papadopoulos 1998) is a heated one, not only with regard to citizens' assemblies (CAs) but participatory governance more broadly (Richardson, Durose and Perry 2019). The top-down/bottom-up dichotomy is frequently understood in terms of the actors initiating the process and determining core design features. This heuristic has been used to distinguish between different scales of government, whereby top-down refers to central government and bottom-up to the local level, closer to the citizens (Willett and Giovannini 2013). More commonly within the literature on democratic innovations, a top-down process is understood as opened by state actors, irrespective of the tier, and a bottom-up process will be one led by civil society. Based on this definition, the CA on Electoral Reform in British Columbia (Warren and Pearse 2008) is an oft celebrated example of top-down processes. By contrast, cases such as the Belgian G1000 project (Caluwaerts

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and Reuchamps 2015), led by civil society, social movements or grassroots groups, are defined as bottom-up.

Scholars and practitioners frequently emphasize the need to strengthen the links between an assembly and "empowered' political and institutional actors to increase impact on binding decisions. A CA initiated by state actors or public agencies would therefore appear to guarantee greater influence on decision-making institutions, as well as stronger legitimacy, as it is sanctioned by elected representatives or accountable public agencies. However, to date amongst the many examples of CAs commissioned and endorsed by public actors, only a small number could be said to have led directly to policy or constitutional change, generally when coupled with mechanisms of direct democracy, such as referendums (Jacquet and Minsart, in this *Handbook*; Gastil and Richards 2013; Farrell et al. 2019). Civil society-led processes, although mostly failing to connect citizens' recommendations to the political agenda, are perceived to be better able to mobilize civic participation (Cornwall 2004) and generate stronger links to the wider public sphere (Perry and May 2010; Wagenaar and Wood 2018). For this reason, participatory and deliberative democrats frequently "fetishize" bottom-up processes (for a critique of this literature see Richardson, Durose and Perry 2019).

In this chapter, we move away from black and white distinctions and recognize that top-down and bottom-up approaches might in fact exist in a dynamic relationship (Bua and Bussu 2021). We note how the rise in "hybrid processes" on the ground is stimulating new thinking towards more systemic approaches to participatory governance (Bussu 2019). Different components, top-down and bottom-up, might in fact be sequenced and/or interact with each other (see Elstub, Ercan and Mendonça 2016; Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012), as a variety of participatory spaces, including but not only CAs, can create channels for different publics to participate at different points in the policy process.

The chapter first reviews the literature on CAs to describe salient traits of both top-down and bottom-up ideal types. We flesh out core characteristics in each case and identify four different dimensions that characterize top-down/bottom-up CAs based on: (1) initiating actors, (2) process design, (3) normative values, and (4) core aims guiding the process. The following sections present examples of CAs that are described as top-down, such as the recent Climate Assembly UK (Elstub et al. 2021) or bottom-up, such as the German Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Democracy (e.g., Della Porta and Felicetti 2022; Fleuß 2021; Landemore 2020). By applying the four dimensions to the analysis of these and other cases, we show that top-down and bottom-up tend to operate on a *continuum* or *spectrum* (combining the four dimensions in different ways) and display varying degrees of top-down/bottom-up orientation. We elaborate a new gradual categorization of top-down and bottom-up CAs, reflecting on ways in which characteristics of each type could help us develop more effective and legitimate processes.

11.2 Top down or bottom up? Beyond black and white distinctions

The literature on mini-publics has historically focused on top-down (i. e., state-led) deliberative initiatives (e. g., Bächtiger and Parkinson 2019; Elstub and McLaverty 2014). These processes have a long history which predates the deliberative turn in the field (Floridia 2017); they are often presented as "democratic innovations" (Smith 2009; Elstub and Escobar 2019) that can help public officials deal with complex policy issues that "traditional" forms of governing fail to deliver (Warren 2009). Mark Warren's (2014) work on governance-driven democratization offers the best description of *elite-led* forms of democratic innovations, where the aim is both to address the legitimacy crisis of representative institutions and experts and to improve policymaking, by involving new voices and interests. Due to close ties with established political elites and institutions (often reflected in government funding), top-down CAs in principle are more closely linked to the political agenda of the day and pursue less "disruptive" goals (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2016). Accordingly, their results appear to be, at least in rhetoric, more likely to be endorsed and implemented.

Bottom-up (i. e., civil society-led) approaches to CAs are on the rise, as civil society actors and social movements become more familiar with and reclaim and reinvent the deliberative toolbox (Della Porta and Felicetti 2022; Bua and Bussu 2021). These processes may be crowdfunded and/or funded by charitable organizations. A bottom-up approach is generally understood to be less concerned with specific designs and instead provide opportunities for participants to influence both the content and direction of the process. Thus, it might open the space to pursue more radical and even disruptive aims to challenge established power relations (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2015). However, bottom-up processes raise practical challenges. As they might lack clear connections to existing institutions and policymaking processes, they might risk producing less specific and actionable recommendations, reducing opportunities for concrete outcomes, and they might lack legitimacy without the endorsement of elected bodies (Lafont 2015; 2020).

Whilst this brief outline of bottom-up and top-down processes suggests that CAs' categorization strongly relies on the agents who initiate and steer these processes, a closer look reveals that the matter is more complex. Irrespective of which *actors* (i. e. state v. non-state) initiate the CA, the *process* itself can also be described as either top-down or bottom-up. Top-down assemblies tend to be tightly organized around a clearly defined problem, with a top-down approach to process design, which is pre-determined, and with expert evidence, structure, and voting options agreed in advance by the commissioning or organizing body. Citizens are expected to engage in a deliberation around predefined policy options, with limited opportunities to reframe the issue and expand the scope of the evidence around it. The recommendations citizens are able to put forward are therefore shaped by the way the process is designed. In a top-down process, assembly members' function is to provide the views of citizens to

inform decisions, but they are not expected to engage with the wider political context (Cherry et al. 2021).

A bottom-up approach, by contrast, is characterized by a more open structure that allows participants to set the agenda, with greater emphasis on citizen-driven questions. Whilst public agencies will often prefer a top-down process that is easier to control and manage, and civil society actors might favour a bottom-up approach, this distinction does not always stand. There are increasing examples of bottom-up processes opened by state actors which involve the public directly in agenda setting in an attempt to tackle distrust and grapple with wicked problems, from increased polarization to societal impacts of new technology or climate change. *Le Grand Débat* launched in France by President Macron in January 2019 could be seen as a recent example of this more hybrid approach.

A third distinction concerns *normative values* informing the preference for top-down versus bottom-up, which also underpin different conceptions of democracy and reasons for expanding the scope and reach of democracy. The idea of "bottom-up legitimacy" remains at the heart of the participatory and deliberative project, whereby legislation and the "rules of the democratic game" must ultimately be rooted in affected citizens' perspectives, needs and preferences (Fleuß 2021). In this respect, a bottom-up approach might appear to be more attuned to the normative ambitions of participatory democracy as it responds better to more radical participatory aspirations for inclusion and social justice (Bua and Bussu 2021). Participatory democrats such as Pateman (2012) have critiqued the top-down nature of most CAs and other mini-publics; they have accused deliberative democrats of having renounced the aspirations of broad participation. Deliberative democrats such as Fishkin (2009) are less concerned with mass participation and would perceive social movements as inferior, or even harmful, compared to the "enlightened opinion" of a randomly selected panel.

The last dimension describes the *core aims.* The rationale behind a top-down approach is generally *functionalistic*; the agenda is shaped from above based on the technocratic needs of the public agency(ies) that "invite" citizen participation (Cornwall 2004). Within this context, CAs can help generate new information to strengthen effective governance but might also be designed to increase popular support for specific policy outcomes, in order to pre-empt social opposition (Papadopoulos 2012). Within a bottom-up approach, the concern might be more explicitly on disruptive change to political, social, and economic structures that would ensure meaningful opportunities for citizens to participate. The new wave of bottom up CAs led by social movements and grassroots group can be interpreted as a promising synthesis between these two normative positions, as it reclaims the deliberative toolbox to foster epistemic value but also more radical participation that challenges the socio-economic and political status quo (Bua and Bussu 2021).

Table 11.1 summarizes these ideal-typical characteristics of top-down and bottom-up CAs and categorizes them under the four dimensions described above: 1) the actor(s) leading the process (state v. non state); 2) the approach to the process itself (open v.

close); 3) the normative values (epistemic v. democratic); and 4) their core aims to either strengthen or challenge existing institutions.

Table 11.1: Ideal types: Top-down/Bottom-up CAs

Dimensions	Top-down CA	Bottom-up CA
1.(Initiating) Actors	Public agencies/state institutions	Social movements, civil society, grassroot initiatives
– Funding	Commissioning organization	Crowdfunding, charity
– Implementation	Potentially stronger links to policymakers and focus on policy on the agenda might increase impact	Looser links to policymaking and political agenda
2. Process design	Process design predetermined based on predefined goals	Process design (at least partly) a result of co-production
– Agenda-setting	Agenda, goals and core questions/issues predefined	Agenda-setting as part of the CA-process
3. Normative values informing CAs	*Primarily epistemic:* Informing public decision-making based on "enlightened" citizen deliberation	*Primarily democratic inclusion:* bottom-up legitimacy of collectively binding laws/policies
4. Core aims	Preferences on predefined policy issues; legitimation of (potentially controversial) policies	Broader/more comprehensive and potentially radical reform projects
– Relationship to institutions	Functionalistic; improving/strengthening existing institutions	Disrupting the status quo

We must emphasize that the top-down/bottom-up dichotomy is not always clear-cut. Real world processes can rarely be subsumed under one "top-down" or "bottom-up" ideal type and rather operate on a continuum, combining the elements summarized in Table 11.1 in different ways, for example by involving a mix of state, civil society and grassroots actors, or by having a state-led but open process or *vice versa.*

11.3 Top-down citizens' assemblies: Towards systemic designs

Since the turn of the century, top down, state-led CAs have grown in scope and numbers across polities from the local to the EU level, as an attempt to address the crisis of legitimacy of representative institutions and as part of efforts to tackle so-called wicked policy problems, such as climate change. We are witnessing increasing experimentation to couple top-down CAs with parliamentary committees as in Australia (Hendriks 2016) or with processes of direct democracy, such as referendums, as seen in Canada (War-

ren and Pearse 2008) and Oregon (Gastil and Richards 2013), over a range of policy areas. There are also increasing examples of mixed-deliberation involving both citizens and elected officials or bureaucrats, as in the case of the Irish Constitutional Convention (ICC) (Farrell et al. 2019).

The Climate Assembly UK (CAUK) is a recent example that helps analyse the limitations and opportunities of an approach that we define as top-down in terms of 1) the actors leading the process, 2) the process itself, 3) the normative values underpinning it, and 4) the core aims. Whilst following the same broad format as many of the exemplary cases often covered in the literature, such as the BCCA, CAUK presents some characteristics that make it a paradigmatic case of the new wave of state-led CAs on climate change; it provides an indication of what state-led digital-analogue CAs might look like and what challenges they raise. The CAUK was commissioned in 2020 by the UK parliament (*state-led*) to agree measures that would help the UK meet its target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 (*epistemic value*) (Elstub et al. 2021). The CA was structured based on a classic format, with 108 randomly selected assembly members engaging in deliberation with guidance from facilitators. External experts and advocates providing evidence were chosen by the organizers, through what can be described as a *close process*, with the core aim to *strengthen and legitimize* decision-making on climate policies. Similarly to other recent processes such as the French Climate Convention (FCC), and differently from a traditional format, CAUK assembly members were split into different topic groups for part of the process, to optimize the limited time available to cover a range of topics. This meant that members did not always have access to the same information and were not able to make decisions on all issues. This might have compromised the ability of the assembly to co-ordinate recommendations across all topics. As was the case for other CAs happening during the pandemic, and possibly indicative of future trends in a pragmatic effort to reduce costs and increase reach, part of the deliberation process moved online to meet social distancing regulations. The overall experience was quite positive for participants, and this hybrid (digital/analogue) approach might help address some of the criticisms levelled against top-down CAs that they have limited reach, are expensive and difficult to scale up.

Although CAUK was commissioned by the UK Parliament, the connection with representative structures, as is often the case with CAs and democratic innovations more broadly, had many shortcomings. The high turnover in committee membership following snap general elections in 2019, shortly after the CA had been commissioned, affected political engagement with the process. Furthermore, CAUK never gained full support from government; a lack of planning and guidance on follow up on recommendations also limited its impact (Elstub et al. 2021). These are persistent barriers that continue to plague even processes with strong political backing. The claim that a top-down/state-led approach increases opportunities for impact is often challenged by the reality that these processes are still vulnerable to changes in the political cycle, resistance to citizen influence among public servants, and the complexities of policymaking. The CAUK was more effective than previous deliberative initiatives in the UK at gaining media cover-

age. However, public awareness of the process remained low, particularly in a context where public attention was grabbed by the pandemic and Brexit.

Whereas the benefits of CAs in terms of learning outcomes for participants and the quality of policy ideas and recommendations emerging though facilitated deliberation are well documented, the *ad hoc,* top-down process design has several limitations when it comes to tangible policy and democratic impact. As a reaction, more innovative designs are increasingly taking a systemic lens. The recent Ostbelgien Model, in the German-speaking region of Belgium, has become a trailblazer of this systemic approach to CAs. Niessen and Reuchamps (2019) identify several aspects in which this process differentiates itself from previous initiatives. It responds to the limited policy impact that plagues most CAs, firstly by creating a quasi-institutional connection to parliament and secondly by making this connection permanent. Further, Ostbelgien attempts to broaden the scope of a top-down process design, by giving substantive autonomy to the new permanent Citizen Council, which can set the agenda and institute three CAs each year to deliberate and propose recommendations over the issues identified by the Council itself. In so doing, Ostbelgien, which based on the actor dimension can be described as top-down (*state-led*) is incorporating bottom-up elements when it comes to process, as the latter is open to citizen agenda-setting. By embedding these CAs within the yearly policy and political cycle, with opportunities for oversight and follow up, Ostbelgien realizes the aspiration of ongoing, back-and-forth dialogue between citizens and policy-makers. In this way, normative values and core aims respond both to the top-down functionalistic orientation to strengthen epistemic utility and produce better policies, and bottom-up democratic aspirations, with potentially disruptive effects on the working of traditional institutions.

11.4 Bottom-up citizens' assemblies: Reclaiming the deliberative toolbox to meet bottom-up demands

Typically, when CAs are launched and funded independently from state actors or public agencies (i.e. civil society/grassroots-led), they are ascribed more disruptive potential and often presented as better equipped for bringing marginalized voices to the fore (see Table 11.1). Whilst random selection in state-led processes is also presented as a way of including voices that are often at the margins of political and public life, as it claims to provide every citizen with an equal chance of being invited (although this is debatable), it does little to remove many of the barriers to participation that stand in the way of lower socioeconomic cohorts and other marginalized segments of the population (Harris 2021). There may be a host of factors that alienate these groups (e.g., a sense of self-inefficacy, distrust, cynicism, as well as material and time poverty). Embeddedness within communities is essential to foster inclusive participation. In this respect, civil society can play a crucial role in anchoring participation in

the community and reaching out to disempowered groups (Bussu et al. 2022). However, as civil society-led processes can be more or less open in terms of focus and process, they can also be vulnerable to capture by the most resource-rich citizens.

Based on the dimensions examined above (actors, process, normative values, and core aims), we can distinguish two sub-types in the vast array of bottom-up initiatives that took place in the past decade. Assemblies such as the Irish Initiative *We the Citizens* (2011; henceforth: WtC) and the more recent *Citizens' Assembly on Brexit* (2017; henceforth: CAB) have focused on a particularly salient and heavily disputed political issue which political elites and routinized democratic procedures could not adequately deal with (also see Renwick et al. 2018: 656). Both WtC and the CAB were launched by teams of researchers (e.g., Renwick et al. 2018: 650). Whilst these assemblies were initiated by civil society actors, they largely used a top-down approach to process design and dealt with a comparatively narrow range of topics and questions on abortion policies in Ireland, and trade and migration policies in post-Brexit UK. In terms of normative values, the focus was on citizens' epistemic advantage, "to demonstrate the value of citizen-oriented, deliberative approaches to achieving large-scale political reform" (Farrell, O'Malley and Suiter 2013: 100). Yet, in practical terms core rationales of both initiatives were to "feed deliberately and publicly into the political reform agenda" and to contribute to a more inclusive and constructive dialogue in the broader public sphere and society (Farrell, O'Malley and Suiter 2013: 100).

More radical approaches have aimed at challenging and reconceptualizing the very "rules of the democratic game". The *Icelandic Initiative for Constitutional Reform* (2010 – 2013; henceforth: ICR) and the German *Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Democracy* (2019; henceforth: CAD) were explicitly framed and designed as "disruptive" initiatives, i.e., they "challenge[d] the political status quo, by targeting the perceived gap between elites and citizens" (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2016: 16). They differ from "more piecemeal" efforts aiming at changing particular laws or policies and explicitly explore options for innovating and/or complementing the existing institutional infrastructure of democratic politics (Landemore 2020: 152 – 153; Fleuß 2021: 147). In the ICR's case, Iceland's political and financial crisis in 2008 triggered a protest movement which called for more and more immediate citizen involvement in political decision-making that culminated in drafting a novel constitutional document (Della Porta 2020: 36 – 38). Whilst the German CAD's initiative did not evolve out of a particular protest or social movement, it was nevertheless a response to German citizens' increasing disinterest and distrust in representative politics.

In all these initiatives, policy options were co-created by experts and citizens, through an open process. This involved a multi-staged approach, integrating citizens in (online) initiatives for crowdsourcing ideas and agenda-setting (Della Porta 2020: 36 – 38; Fleuß 2021: 159; Landemore 2020: 157 – 182). The funding approach and limited ties, if any, to established political elites were instrumental in "keeping the agenda open" (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2015: 157). Whilst ICR explicitly adopted crowdfunding and crowdsourcing approaches, the German CAD's process was funded and designed by a charitable civil society organization, *Mehr Demokratie,* to strengthen lay

citizens' impact on collectively binding decision-making (Mehr Demokratie 2021). CAD was the first German CA that involved citizens systematically in "co-developing" German democracy and thinking about institutional reforms at the federal level. Participants proposed to combine deliberative forums with referendums; they advocated for "citizens' councils with randomly selected citizens at the federal level", "nationwide referendums" and "an independent staff unit for citizen participation and direct democracy" (Fleuß 2021: 148; also see Bürgergutachten 2019).

Mehr Demokratie combined a public relations campaign with targeted interactions and partnerships with established political elites such as Wolfgang Schäuble, the then president of the German parliament. A core aim here was to "change hearts and minds" of citizens and public officials, rather than implementing *ad hoc* institutional reforms. These strategies certainly contributed to raising awareness for alternative ways of "doing democracy", but their long-term impact on Germany's constitutional and institutional infrastructure might be harder to achieve. The ICR which emerged out of combinations of disruptive protests and government elite interventions was confronted with similar problems: the constitutional reform was at the end of the day blocked by conservatives in the Icelandic parliament (Della Porta 2020: 37–43). Problems concerning the implementation of bottom-up CAs' decisions are also rooted in the ways in which liberal or representative democracies conceptualize and generate "legitimate" collectively binding decisions: in this respect, the legitimacy of bottom-up CAs, as they bypass institutionalized, constitutionally embedded channels for decision-making, is often questioned.

CAs such as CAD or the ICR can be described as bottom-up across the four dimensions we have identified (Table 11.1): they were led by civil society actors (1), and they were based on an open process that enabled citizens' agenda-setting, creating new space for citizen-led democratic innovation (2). Their normative aspirations were to widen the scope of democracy, bridging the gap between citizens and representatives (3), with the core aims of disrupting the status quo and building new support for a participatory society (4). Whilst in both cases there were important efforts at working with political elites, these processes also illustrate the complexity of working with state institutions when the latter are not the commissioners with stakes in the process: "collaboration with the state is not simply a resource to secure even the highest type of impact (i. e., constitutional change). The state actually exposes democratic experiments to legal, political and administrative dynamics that might halt the process of change" (Della Porta and Felicetti 2022: 78). Cooperation and ties to government elites can significantly limit CAs' disruptive potential, independence, and credibility, yet substantive political change requires civil society actors to navigate existing power structures.

Table 11.2 summarizes the cases described based on the four dimensions of actor, process, normative values, and core aims.

Table 11.2: Top-down and bottom-up CA across four dimensions

Cases	Actor	Process	Normative Goals	Core aims
BCCA	State-led	Close	Epistemic	Functionalistic
CAUK	State-led	Close	Epistemic	Functionalistic
FCC	State-led	Open	Epistemic and Democratic	Functionalistic
OSTBELGIEN	State-led	Hybrid	Epistemic and Democratic	Functionalistic
CAB	Civil society-led	Close	Epistemic and Democratic	Functionalistic
ICC	State-led	Open	Epistemic and Democratic	Functionalistic
WtC	Civil society-led	Close	Epistemic and Democratic	Functionalistic
CAD	Civil society-led	Open	Democratic	Disruptive
ICR	Civil society-led	Open	Democratic	Disruptive
G1000	Civil society-led	Open	Democratic	Disruptive

11.5 Top-down and bottom-up: A dynamic relationship

The top-down vs. bottom-up heuristic has underpinned many analyses of democratic innovations. The focus has often been on actors opening the process: bottom-up as in civil society-led governance is generally presented as better able to mobilize wider participation (Cornwall 2004) and produce radical transformation (Bua and Bussu 2021); top-down, as in state-led participation, is depicted as more effective at producing impact through links to the political and policy agenda. "Expert citizens" attending these "invited" forums, however, might be disconnected from the wider public and at risk of co-optation (Bang 2005). A closer look at exemplary top-down and bottom-up initiatives, however, leads to more nuanced conclusions.

Firstly, we argue that the distinction between bottom-up and top-down CAs should not be merely drawn in terms of actors initiating the process. The openness of the process and whether participants are able to set the agenda as well as values and goals underlying, informing, and structuring the CA might have as big an impact on citizen empowerment as the actors initiating it. Along these lines, Richardson et al. (2019) argue that civil society-led initiatives can be equally at risk of capture by sectional interests – and disconnected from the needs and preferences of affected citizens – if the process is not open and aiming at broad inclusion. Depending on the context and the issue, a state-led approach might indeed provide better democratic channels to broker between hotly contested claims.

Secondly, an adequate combination of the characteristics of our ideal types of bottom-up and top-down assemblies can be helpful to achieve different goals in different contexts. Whilst some CAs primarily wish to foster new discourses in the broader society about political alternatives, others aim to have concrete impact on policies or constitutional decisions. The elements that characterize ideal-types of top-down and bottom-up initiatives can thus be used as a "toolbox" that allows for flexible design and

combination in democratic processes. A top-down process design with a predefined agenda may be well-suited for a "consultative" use of CAs, to gauge the views of the general public if it had access to balanced and as far as possible unbiased information and had the opportunity to deliberate with peers. Such CAs can perform an ancillary role to increase the effectiveness of representative institutions and strengthen existing governance structures. Yet, processes that exclude citizens from agenda-setting and process design will be ill-suited if the core aim is to challenge and question hegemonical discourses or the very "rules of the democratic game". Here, we need to keep in mind that different *kinds* of initiating actors (state/civil society) *tend* to pursue and prioritize different goals: state-led initiatives are more likely to make consultative use of CAs whilst civil society-led initiatives are prone to challenge established institutions.

Nevertheless, in recent years CAs have grown in complexity and new hybrid experiments have emerged on the ground that synthesize different democratic practices involving a range of actors (Felicetti 2021), and increasingly including a mix of deliberative, representative, and participatory aspects (Felicetti 2021; Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2015; Gastil et al. 2018). These are often complex arrangements including a series of interacting arenas, whilst "hybridized and inventive" radical experiments have been emerging, which attempt to combine top-down and bottom-up elements (Sintomer 2018). Whilst more technocratic and consultative CA, such as the Citizen Assembly UK, continue to gain popularity amongst politicians, observers are paying greater attention to their limitations, and we are seeing renewed efforts at institutionalizing permanent CAs that influence the cycle of policymaking in a continuous fashion, such as the above mentioned Ostbelgien. New movement parties and political coalitions, such Barcelona en Comú in Spain (Bua and Bussu 2021) or the Agora party in Belgium have embedded sortition and deliberative and participatory tools (which normally characterize top-down processes) within their organizational structures. The Agora case is particularly interesting in this respect, as their CAs are organized by volunteers, but citizen recommendations are then defended in the Brussels Regional Parliament through the elected Agora MP (Junius et al. 2021).

Different top-down and bottom-up CAs can therefore be usefully linked with each other and the democratic system at large. The disappointing record of most CAs, whether top-down or bottom-up, in influencing decisions, as policymakers continue to ignore or cherry pick citizens' recommendations, has informed theory and practice to better link CAs to representative institutions (e. g., Sintomer, Herzberg, and Röcke 2008). But there are also increasing calls and experimentation in linking CAs to the wider society, amid growing concerns, particularly amongst participatory democrats (see Pateman 2012), that CAs may otherwise become apolitical remedial action.

11.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview and a critical reflection on conceptions of top-down and bottom-up CAs. We have identified four main characteristics of each ideal

type, as described in the literature. Ideal-type top-down assemblies are opened by state institutions to address a predefined policy issue and strengthen the legitimacy of the commissioning institution. Ideal-type bottom-up CAs are led by civil society and provide space for citizen agenda-setting and might have ambitions for more radical reform projects, whilst struggling to have tangible impact because of looser or no links with empowered decision-making spaces. However, the practice of CAs is less clear-cut and if bottom-up approaches are not necessarily better than top-down initiatives at bringing in disempowered interests and ensuring more inclusive processes, top-down CAs do not seem to have such a good record in terms of impact just because they work closely with state institutions. Our assessment of four different dimensions of the top-down/bottom-up heuristic facilitates a more differentiated assessment of types of CAs that also may flexibly combine bottom-up and top-down elements. For instance, CAs can be bottom-up because they are led by non-state actors and yet top-down in terms of process, with a predefined policy focus, as in the case of CAB. Away from fetishizing one or the other, different approaches might be better suited to different contexts and different goals. Overall, we are seeing promising developments away from one-off *ad hoc* initiatives and towards processes combining top-down and bottom-up elements in a systemic fashion, potentially strengthening opportunities for more tangible impact and citizen empowerment.

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