A new approach to measure the impact of minipublics on public policy

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*Measuring with a single outcome scale the impact of the Ouderspanel and Citizens’ Panel “Brussels—Make your Mobility”*

Paper presented at the 2020 Politicolognetmaal

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**Introduction**

Minipublics are becoming increasingly popular across western democracies (OECD, 2020) because they can arguably make several positive contributions (see also Jacquet & van der Does, 2020 for a broad literature review). First at an individual level, it can increase the participants’ internal and external efficacy, civic engagement and knowledge (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2018; Grönlund, Setälä, & Herne, 2010; Knobloch & Gastil, 2015) and transform their preferences in an informed and reasoned direction (Bächtiger, Setälä, & Grönlund, 2014; Fishkin, 2011). Second, at a meso-level, mini-publics can instil a culture of participation among the decision-makers and the administration (Gourgues, 2013). Third, minipublics can contribute to the public debate by producing similar effects to the public debate as it does to its participants (Curato & Böker, 2016; Niemeyer, 2014). Fourth, minipublics can provide decision-makers with recommendations and, thereby, try to exert some influence on public policy (Ryan & Smith, 2014, p. 20; Warren, 2009). Although most minipublics are officially convened to make the latter contribution, we still know very little about how and what they effectively contribute to public decision-making.

Jacquet and van der Does (2020) conducted a systematic literature review of the minipublics’ consequences and they distinguish three types of consequences regarding policy-making: the long-term structural transformation of the political system, the consideration of a minipublics’ proposals in the political debate before decision-making, and the degree to which a minipublic’s recommendations are congruent with the public policy. On the latter, the few empirical studies on the impact of minipublics on public policy (hereafter named ‘minipublics’ impact’) investigate whether minipublics can and do have an impact. Some scholars conducting case studies find positive results (Bua, 2017; Farrell & Suiter, 2019; Font, Smith, Galais, & Alarcón, 2018; Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018; Pogrebinschi & Samuels, 2014), while others do not pinpoint any clear policy consequences (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2018; Michels &

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1 This is an early draft, please do not cite without the author’s permission. Send me an email if you want to have a look at the appendix Julien.vrydagh@vub.be.
Binnema, 2018). Other studies have also recently investigated conditions under which minipublics have an impact (Font et al. 2018; Ryan and Pogrebinski 2018).

Two gaps still remain in this recent research agenda. First, it is unclear what the normative assumptions and requirements for an impact are. Older literature conceived the impact as a binary question, in the sense that minipublics were either consequential or unheeded (Pogrebinschi & Samuels, 2014), but scholars nowadays conceive it as a question of degree. In conceptualizing the impact gradually, it remains unclear what are the normative assumptions behind the concept. For instance, Bua (2017, p. 168) speaks of a “a fairly high level of impact” while Pogrebinschi and Ryan determine the degree impact based on the data under investigation (see appendix of Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018). These studies tend to determine the degree of impact based on the empirical data at hand, thereby overlooking the inherent normative dimension of concepts (Freeden, 1994). They do not explicitly engage with the theoretical and normative foundations to justify an empirical difference between a low, moderate or high impact. Relatedly, a second gap refers to the lack of an aggregation formula between the impact of a minipublic’s proposal and the overall impact of a minipublic. All studies rely on a minipublic’s proposal as a unit of analysis. Although such approach does produce insightful findings (see for instance Bua, 2017; Font, Smith, Galais, & Alarcón, 2018; Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018), no research has yet tried to develop an aggregation formula to measure the entire impact of a minipublic. As a consequence, they use uncalibrated measures that are relative because dependent on the case under investigation (see Ragin, 2009, chapter 4). When scholars suggest that a minipublic has a high impact, they do not explicitly engage with the questions of how many influential proposals are required in order to have a ‘high overall impact’, and why we should expect so many influential proposals to be necessary or sufficient for this kind of impact.

Considering these two gaps, the present paper seeks to build a more robust measurement of the minipublics’ impact on public policy. The objective is to develop a single outcome scale that measures the overall influence of a minipublic on public policy. It does so by calibrating the concept of impact. Calibration is a set-theoretic way of determining the extent to which an empirical case – a minipublic - belongs to a theoretically designed set – a minipublic with a low, moderate or high impact on public policy (Ragin, 2000, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). This process requires engaging explicitly with the normative dimension of a minipublic’s impact – i.e. how many influential proposals a minipublics should have. Discussing normatively the impact also implies clarifying the theoretical angle from which I approach it.
The paper thus starts with a review of the impact question in the theoretical literature. It then suggests a normative account of the minipublic’s impact which considers the minipublic’s autonomy as the core normative condition. The minipublic’s autonomy consists of three normative principles—a transformative, consequential, and authentical influence. Basically, I argue that a minipublic is autonomous to the extent that some of its proposals (1) transform decision-makers’ policy preferences, (2) have consequences on the public policy; and (3) are both transformative and consequential. Next, I operationalize these principles and I build a scale which measures the degree of impact. I afterwards apply the scale on two minipublics—the Citizens Panel on Mobility convened in 2017 by the Brussels’ Region and the Parent’s panel organized by the Regional Flemish authority in 2016. After presenting the results, I briefly discuss the scale application and the analysis’ implication.

**A systemic account of the minipublic’s impact on public policy**

I start with locating the scale building within the broader theoretical literature and, more specifically, criticisms against the minipublics’ authority to make binding public decisions (Lafont, 2015, 2019) and the recent systematic approaches of deliberation (Dryzek, 2009; Mansbridge et al., 2012) and democratic theory (Warren, 2017). The concept of a minipublic’s impact differs from the authority to make binding public decision. Lafont (2015, 2019) makes a strong case against the possibility of using decisive minipublics as a shortcut for making the system more deliberative. She argues that such shortcuts are either illegitimate because minipublics’ participants are not accountable to the citizenry or superfluous because the citizenry still to be involved in a macro deliberation. Although I fully support her argument against authoritative minipublics, I argue that her critique has led to conflate the authority to make binding decision with the possibility of minipublics influencing decision makers. However, it is not because minipublics should not make binding public policy decisions that it implies they should neither have any impact on public policy. Minipublics do not have the power of making decisions, but they certainty have the potential to influence them. The power ultimately resides in legitimate decision-makers—that is either the citizenry or its elected representatives—and minipublics’ recommendations therefore should be validated by an authorized decision-maker. I thus define the concept of a minipublic’s impact as the influence minipublics exert on decision-makers and the results of that influence on subsequent public policy.

Two systematic turns have recently shifted the paradigm of deliberation and the use of minipublics. I briefly discuss how the scale relates to each approach. First, the systemic
approach to deliberation posits that scholars should focus on the deliberative system instead of small-scale instances of deliberation such as minipublics (Dryzek, 2010, 2017; Mansbridge et al., 2012). This new paradigm has stimulated scholars to study how minipublics could improve the quality of deliberation in the public sphere (Curato & Böker, 2016; Felicetti et al., 2016; Niemeyer, 2014). As a consequence, the academic attention devoted to minipublics’ impact seems to decline and the few studies dealing with this research agenda tend to grow apart from the systemic turn. However, I argue that this estrangement may be more the result of a misconception of deliberative consequentiality rather than a fundamental incompatibility. The two seminal theoretical pieces that laid the foundation of this systemic approach both contend that deliberation ought to have an impact on political systems. Mansbridge et al. (2012, p. 11) assert that a deliberative system must fulfil an ethical, democratic and epistemic function, with the latter involving that deliberation produces decisions. Likewise, Dryzek (2009, p. 1382, 2010) argues that a system has a deliberative capacity to the extent that its institutions host not only an authentic and inclusive deliberation, but also a consequential one. Hence, both theoretical frameworks imply that deliberation must be consequential.

Whether a minipublic’s impact is relevant does not primarily depend on whether we agree or not with the systemic approach, but rather on whether we believe minipublics should exclusively be used in a participatory track and never on a shortcut track (Lafont, 2019). Scholars adopting a systemic approach to deliberation tend to opt for the participatory track in which a minipublic must improve the quality of macro deliberation and generate more considered opinions among the citizenry (Curato et al., 2019; Curato & Böker, 2016). According to this perspective, the consequentiality of deliberation implies that minipublics first foster macro-deliberation, which subsequently affects public policy. Conversely, a shortcut track contends that a minipublic needs not per se to improve the macro deliberation before affecting public policy, as long as the deference to a minipublic is informed and provides accountability mechanisms (Goodin, Forthcoming; MacKenzie & Warren, 2012; Warren, forthcoming). Although the participatory track is a normative first-choice, the shortcut track can still contribute to democratizing and fostering deliberation in sites of decision-making which suffer from a lack of empowered inclusions and a deficient collective agenda and will formation (Warren, forthcoming, 2017). Therefore, research on minipublics’ impact is

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2 Studies on the impact of minipublics do not mention the systemic turn literature (Font, Smith, Galais, & Alarcón, 2018; Michels & Binnema, 2018; Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018).
compatible with the systemic approach to deliberation and still deserves a spot in the latter’s research agenda.

Second, I also want to build a scale that integrates the problem-based approach to democratic theory (Bächtiger & Parkinson, 2019; Beauvais & Warren, 2019; Mansbridge et al., 2012). The problem-based approach departs from the model-approach to democracy and seeks to be compatible with a problem-based approach in which democratic practices and institutions should be conceived and implemented in order to fulfil the three functions of a democratic system, namely inclusion, collective agenda and will formation, and collective decision-making (Warren, 2017). Minipublics are not the ideal and ultimate deliberative and participatory mechanism which one should convene to increase the legitimacy and democratic credentials of public decision-making (Curato et al., Forthcoming). Instead, minipublics are one institutional means among others that one can deploy in order to solve specific deficient democratic function(s). As a consequence, the normative question of how much impact a minipublic should have on public policy depends on the problem it intends to solve. For instance, a minipublic does not need to exert a substantial impact if its purpose is to enforce empowered inclusion in a political system in which collective agenda and will formation and collective decision-making functions are already effective. The problem-based approach thus implies that the question of a minipublic’s impact becomes contingent to the problem it is supposed to solve (Kuyper & Wolkenstein, 2019, see also Curato et al. forthcoming). As a consequence, the normative dimension of the impact should apply to all minipublics, regardless of problems they intend to solve.

The normative dimension of minipublics’ impact

The problem-based approach thus implies a normative common denominator. I argue that any minipublics should not be instrumentalized so that they can exert an influence on decision-makers that is—at least to some degree—transformative, consequential, and authentical. Instrumentalization refers to the strategical use of a minipublic to “enhance government authorities’ control over political processes and discourses, thus in fact undermining rather than facilitating citizens’ propositions to be critical” (Böker, 2017, p. 28). Critics have pointed out the risk of minipublics being “useful legitimating devices for an already-decided policy” (Pateman, 2012, p. 9; see also Niemeyer, 2014, p. 177; Smith, 2009, p. 18). Likewise, Hammond (2020, p. 7) sees in instrumentalized minipublics the activation of citizens in participatory process to help elites achieve their ends and perpetuate the existing political order.
Whereas Hammond (2020) and Böker and Elstub (2015) oppose to activation the normative concepts of emancipatory or critical minipublics, I opt here for a more neutral concept of autonomy—i.e. the opposite of instrumentalization—that can be applied to all minipublics. Their normative accounts indeed rely on a model-based approach to democracy in which minipublics are conceived as a way to realize a critical reading of deliberative democracy or as an institutional means that necessarily must fulfil a democratic function (Böker, 2017; Böker & Elstub, 2015; Hammond, 2020, p. 20). They assume that political systems suffer from inequalities in political authorities, which is undoubtedly the case for most of political systems. However, I disagree with the assumption that minipublics are the best institutional means to actually redistribute power and curb power inequalities (see Lafont, 2019), and that minipublics would be empowering or critical only to the extent that it realizes the democratic function of empowered inclusion. Not only fulfilling that function requires other democratic practices and institutional means than just minipublics, but also minipublics can be convened in order to realize other democratic functions.

I suggest that we can measure a minipublic’s impact to the extent that its influence on decision-makers is transformative, consequential, and authentical. These three principles are all necessary conditions for an autonomous minipublic. These normative principles rely on some assumptions, namely that the minipublic is properly conducted (Farrell et al., 2019), not decoupled from the decision-making arena (Hendriks, 2016; Mansbridge et al., 2012, p. 23), and formulates recommendations that differ to some extent from the policy agenda of incumbents (Lafont, 2019, pp. 146–160). This normative account also seeks to apply to all minipublics, except the deliberative polls since these do not collectively formulate proposals but express the participants’ preferences regarding specific policy proposals (Elstub, 2014, pp. 168–169).

**Transformative influence**

First, a minipublic should have a transformative influence on decision-makers, that is its proposals should change or instil new ideas in decision-makers’ preferences. Minipublics are one of the best institutional incarnations of deliberation thanks to its careful design and the diversity of its participants. When properly conducted, minipublics produce “political

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3 ‘Recommendations’ is purposively written in plural, because the measurement tool is here developed to minipublics formulating a series of proposals, that is the most common type of minipublics (Elstub, 2014; Setälä & Smith, 2018). The framework could in principle also apply to minipublics with a single proposal, such as deliberative polls, but the calibration process (see below) needs to be adapted in order to determine the extent to which the single proposal fulfils the three principles. Thank you Vincent Jacquet for pointing this out.
judgements that reflect both relevant information and variety of arguments and perspectives” (Mercier & Landemore, 2012; Setälä & Smith, 2018, p. 303). We should thus reasonably expect that decision-makers engage with these recommendations in a relative deliberative fashion. Deliberation involves that preferences, views, and opinions should not be fixed but amenable and should go through some degree of transformation (Dryzek, 1994, 2002, 2009).

As Mansbridge et al. (2010, p. 78) point out, deliberation would be pointless if it does not result in policy-makers adopting “to some degree the perspective of another or taken the other’s interests as their own”. Hence, it is insufficient to just consider whether recommendations are transmitted to the decision-making site, it should also involve some degree of transformation (Dean et al., 2019, p. 706; Dryzek, 2009, p. 1381). Accordingly, if a minipublic does not exert any transformative influence, it implies an instrumentalization because decision-makers do not deliberatively engage with recommendations and it suggests that their initial preferences were already fixed and not amenable to new preferences, opinions, and values.

**Consequential influence**

Second, a minipublic should exert a consequential influence on decision-makers. As previously explained, systemic approach to deliberation also implies that deliberation affects collective decisions (Dryzek, 2009; Mansbridge et al. 2012). Consequentiality refers to the responsiveness of public policy to considered citizens’ opinions (Lafont, 2019). We should expect decision-makers to take up at least some of its recommendations (regardless of whether a minipublic is on a participatory or shortcut track). Consequentiality differs from decisiveness because the latter depends on the problem it seeks to solve, whereas the former indicates if a minipublic did not amount to anything and its proposals’ uptake is not superficial. Without any consequential influence, it casts doubt on decision-makers’ motives to convene an autonomous minipublic and is likely to indicate a window-dressing use (Bherer et al., 2017, pp. 7–8; Gourgues, 2013; Walker, 2014, p. 205). Convening a minipublic should result in at least some effects on public policy without regard to whether minipublics’ proposals diverge or confirm decision-makers’ preferences. If a minipublic is well-convened, it is unlikely that none of its considered recommendations make enough sense to deserve an uptake in public policy. If the minipublics formulate only one recommendation, the
**Authentical influence**

Third, a minipublic is autonomous to the extent that its influence on decision-makers is authentical. Transformative and consequential influences are insufficient on their own to ensure that a minipublic is not instrumentalized. Indeed, various studies have shown that decision-makers cherry-pick proposals that fit their own agenda and disregard or partially integrate diverging recommendations (Bua, 2017; Font, Smith, Galais, & Alarcón, 2018; Parkinson, 2006; Smith, 2009a). Authentic influence concretely means that some proposals with transformative influence should also be consequential and is thus dependent on these two types of influences. It captures that decision-makers are “sufficiently committed to democratic values such that they are willing to shape their political actions in response to the output of [minipublic’s] scrutiny, even if they are disappointing, instead of simply ignoring or bypassing them” (Lafont, 2019, p. 150). It makes sure that a minipublic exerts a consequential influence on its own because it indicates that decision-makers consequently engage with a recommendation that does not coincide with their own agenda. Contrariwise, if decision-makers only take up proposals that align with their own preferences and either disregard or take up superficially proposals that diverge from their policy agenda, it suggests a minipublic’s instrumentalization.

**The operationalization of a minipublics’ impact**

Most empirical studies adopt a convergence approach to the impact, that is they suggest that a minipublic has an impact if subsequent public policy coincides with a recommendation (Michels, 2011; Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018; Pogrebinschi & Samuels, 2014). I also adopt this approach, but I add two dimensions in order to better capture the degree of autonomy of a minipublic and to offer a more robust indication of whether a minipublic’s proposal effectively produced a policy effect on its own. First, the kind of influence enables to identify how a minipublic’s recommendations relate to decision-makers’ initial preferences and the extent to which the taken-up recommendations coincide with their political agenda. Second, the public policy component discerns how recommendations are integrated in public policy and whether
these uptakes are tokenistic or consequential. Moreover, the operationalization is specifically developed to examine the decision-making stage of policy making.\textsuperscript{5}

\textbf{The influence of a minipublic}

In order to operationalize a transformative influence, I examine how taken-up recommendations relate to decision-makers’ initial preferences. More specifically, I look into decision-makers’ set of preferences before a minipublic and analyse whether minipublics’ recommendations diverge or align with them. This sequential approach stems from a previous study (Vrydagh, 2019) which elaborates an analytical framework based on the concept of influence, understood as the inducement of an opinion change among decision-makers (March, 1955). I measure this change by examining how decision-makers’ initial preferences are changed or confirmed following a minipublic. Depending on how a minipublic’s proposal affects decision-makers’ initial preferences, we can logically distinguish five kinds of influences, as displayed in table 1.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
T0 & T1 & T2 & Kinds of uptake & Kinds of influence \\
\hline
A & A & A & Uptake & \textbf{Continuous influence} \\
 & a & Partial uptake & Limited continuous influence \\
 & B or o & No uptake & No influence \\
\hline
a & A & A & Uptake & \textbf{Enriching influence} \\
 & a & Partial uptake & Limited enriching influence \\
 & B or o & No uptake & No influence \\
\hline
o & A & A & Uptake & \textbf{Innovating influence} \\
 & a & Partial uptake & Limited innovating influence \\
 & B or o & No uptake & No influence \\
\hline
B & A & A & Uptake & \textbf{Shifting influence} \\
 & a & Partial uptake & Limited shifting influence \\
 & B & No uptake & No influence \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{a typology of minipublics’ influences}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{5} Minipublics can affect public policy at latter stages of policy-making (Barrett et al., 2012). However, the longer the time frame, the more factors can cause a policy effect. Furthermore, the implementation stage can distort the public policy (Boswell, 2016). For these reasons, most empirical studies on minipublics’ impact focus on the decision-making stage (Michels, 2011; Michels & Binnema, 2018; Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018). Since the scale seeks to examine the minipublics’ influence on decision-makers and the result of that influence on public policy, I also focus on the policy output that can be manipulated by decision-makers (Kraft & Furlong, 2012, p. 4)
First, when a minipublic formulates a recommendation that aligns with decision-makers’ initial preferences, it has a continuous influence. Second, a minipublic exerts an enriching influence when its recommendation complements decision-makers’ initial preferences. Enriching influence means that a minipublic’s proposal coincides with decision-makers’ initial preferences but adjusts it. Third, a minipublic has an innovating influence when it recommends something that was not present in the decision-makers’ initial set of preferences. Fourth, when a minipublic’s proposal radically changes the initial policy course, it exerts a shifting influence on decision-makers. Fifth, a minipublic has an inhibiting influence when one of its proposals convinces decision-makers to abandon the initial policy scheme because the minipublic disregarded it.

These sorts of influence help to capture both transformative and authentical influence. When a minipublic exerts a diverging influence, that is an innovating, shifting, or inhibiting influence, it has transformed decision-makers’ preferences. Conversely, when it has a continuous or enriching influence, it corroborates decision-makers’ policy agenda. The latter is not normatively wrong as such because it signals decision-makers that their policy preferences are supported by a minipublic’s considered opinions (Lafont, 2019, pp. 138 & 150). Furthermore, if we integrate Font et al. (2018)’s uptake indicator, we can also distinguish three kinds of uptakes, namely the uptake which refers to the full integration of a minipublic’s proposal; the partial uptake which means that decision-makers fragmentally integrate a proposal; and the absence of uptake which corresponds to the absence of influence. The kind of uptake identifies when decision-makers partly take up a proposal’ content. It does not equal a lack of consequentiality because a partial uptake can still be consistent with the proposal’s objective.

Public policy

In order to measure the consequentiality, we must examine a minipublics’ effects on public policy. Existing studies on the matter tend to have a monolithic conception of public policy and do not distinguish the content of a public policy (Mazeaud & Boas, 2012), that is what the government chooses to do (Howlett et al., 2018, pp. 150–151). I argue, however, that it is essential to look at the consistency between the content of a minipublic’s recommendation and the public policy it influenced. Consistency thus goes beyond congruency as it analyses the
extent to which the public matches a recommendation’s ambitions and spirit. To capture consistency, I deconstruct the public policy in three different components that can be found at three levels of abstraction, as displayed in table 2.

On the one hand, we can identify three components of public policy: goals, means, and framing. Goals are a government’s aims when pursuing a policy, whereas means are instruments and tools that a government uses to attain these goals (Jenkins, 1978; Lasswell, 1956; Walsh, 1994). The framing then corresponds to the problematization and interpretation of a phenomenon (Colebatch, 2009; Knill & Tosun, 2012). Framing is particularly relevant for minipublics because they do not only produce clear policy proposals with goals and means but also generate arguments to motivate their recommendations and these arguments contain significant persuasive power that can eventually change the policy-makers’ preferences (Michels & Binnema, 2018).

Table 2: an overview of policy components and levels of abstraction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meta-argument</td>
<td>The meta-arguments that explain a whole set of policy</td>
<td>The policy argument</td>
<td>Arguments about the policy’s realization on the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General aims</td>
<td>The general aims that a set of policy should attain</td>
<td>The operationalizable policy objectives</td>
<td>Arguments about concrete aspects of a policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instrument logic</td>
<td>The logic of instruments that are used throughout the set of policy</td>
<td>Policy tools</td>
<td>Specific policy targets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The specific type of policy instrument that is used to attain the objective</td>
<td>The concrete aims and efforts that are required to achieve the policy objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calibration</td>
<td>The specific settings of policy tools required to implement policy program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to Howlett (2019; 2009), these three policy components differ depending on their level of abstraction. Relying on the seminal work of Hall (1993), Howlett (2019, pp. 44–45) distinguishes three levels of abstraction: abstract, policy and program. An abstract level refers to the “dominant image” of public policy, entailing basic assumptions about the issue, what ought to be done about it and with which sort of policy means (Jones & Baumgartner, 1993).
The policy level corresponds to one policy instrument in a whole policy field. At this meso-level, public policy’s components dispose of their ungraspable dimension and become operationalizable. The framing is about a distinctive policy instrument, while policy goals are measurable and policy means observable. Finally, a program level is the lowest level of abstraction where policy components are set. They represent the on-the-ground setting of a public policy. The public policy’s typology enables the examination of an uptake’s consistency. For instance, if a minipublic recommends a general policy aims (e.g. rethink the urban public space) but a congruent public policy only mentions policy means at the program level (e.g. increase the number of bike lanes), there is then a lack of consistency between the minipublic’s ambition and the policy uptake, which indicates a deficient consequentiality. When a proposal and a subsequent public policy consist of the same components, the uptake indicator helps to grasps a potential lack of consistency.

**The single outcome scale**

The figure 1 schematically displays a summary of the ontological relationships between indicators, normative principles and the central concept following a two-level theory approach (Goertz & Mahoney, 2005). The last step consists now of presenting the aggregation formula that allows the analytical lens to shift from the proposals to the whole minipublic.

I rely on the calibration process which determines the extent to which an empirical object is a member of a theoretical set (Ragin, 2000, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). Calibration stems from the set-theoretic approach of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and measures the extent to which an empirical object—mini-public’s recommendation—possesses
the characteristics of a represented property—a consequential, transformative, and authentical influence (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). I opt for a fuzzy set approach which allows a gradual set-membership\(^6\). This implies that the scale ranges from 0 — not being influential at all — to 1, being influential. In between, 0.5 corresponds to the crossover point, when we cannot identify whether the mini-public has a low or moderate impact. I set five different memberships in the scale, as shown in table 3. Regarding the aggregation, a minipublic’s impact corresponds to the normative principle with the lowest score because all three principles are necessary conditions to the concept of impact\(^7\). We must, however, still determine the proportion of proposals that is required for a minipublic to fulfil each principle. Such calibration must rely on both theory and empirical evidence that are external to the case under investigation and report clearly and transparently how we set the membership threshold (Greckhamer et al., 2018; Ragin, 2000, p. 150; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 32). Because of the scarce number of empirical and theoretical studies on minipublic’s impact, this scale is by no means definitive as it just seeks to provide a more systematic evaluative scale for future empirical research which, in turn, can contribute to adjusting these normative thresholds. It is also important to emphasize that this suggestive scale does not definitively determine normative requirements. As the problem-based approach posits, these thresholds must be adapted to the problem a minipublic seeks to address. If a minipublic fulfils a function of collective decision-making (Kuyper & Wolkenstein, 2019; Warren, 2017), it would make sense to set higher thresholds\(^8\).

Table 3: Calibration of normative principles for the single outcome scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No impact — 0</th>
<th>Low — 0.33</th>
<th>Point of indecision — 0.5</th>
<th>Moderate — 0.66</th>
<th>High - 0.9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transformative</td>
<td>0% of all proposals</td>
<td>0.1%-4.9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5.1%-15%</td>
<td>&gt;15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequential</td>
<td>0% of all proposals</td>
<td>0.1%-14.9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15.1%-33%</td>
<td>&gt;33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentical</td>
<td>0% of proposals with a</td>
<td>0.1%-9.9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10.1%-25%</td>
<td>&gt;25.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^6\) The fuzziness is not the result of an imprecise empirical measure but instead to ‘conceptual boundaries that are not sharply defined’ (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 47).

\(^7\) Each principle is an INUS condition, that is they are ‘insufficient but necessary parts of a condition’ (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 79).

\(^8\) In the same vein, one could think adapting one specific principle with regard to the problem. For instance, if a minipublic is convened to solve a political deadlock, we could set a higher threshold for transformative influence.
Regarding transformative influence, Setälä (2017, p. 851) suggests that decision-makers have “the tendency to interpret evidence according to pre-existing views” (Kunda, 1990; Mercier & Landemore, 2012), thereby being subject to a confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998). In order to be realistic, the proportion of proposals with a transformative influence should not be too high. I suggest that at least 15.1% of proposals correspond to a high level, between 5.1 and 15% to a moderate level, and less than 4.9% to a low level, with 0% meaning no influence.\(^9\)

With regard to consequential influence, empirical studies show that democratic innovations and deliberative participatory mechanisms can have up to a third of their proposals taken up. Font et al. (2018) found that 36.2% of proposals were fully implemented, meanwhile Bua (2017) and Pogrebinshi (2013)’s analyses show an uptake of respectively 25% and 16.83%. Although these empirical studies do not focus specifically on minipublics\(^10\) and thus do not provide indication for transformative and authentical influences, they still indicate what we could expect in terms of consequential influence. I therefore suggest that a high level refers to at least 33%, a moderate level to a range from 15.1 to 33%, and a low level between 0.1 up to 14.9%.

Finally, an authentical influence corresponds the proportion of transformative influence that is also consequential. Literature on democratic innovations’ impact and policy change draw a rather pessimistic picture about the possibility of going beyond decision-makers’ own convictions and path dependency. Studies have widely reported that decision-makers tend to cherry-pick proposals that fit their own agenda and disregard diverging proposals (Bua, 2017; Font, Smith, Galais, & Alarcón, 2018; Parkinson, 2006; Smith, 2009a). Moreover, to the extent that transformative influence innovates or propose a shift from existing policies, it is unlikely that it effectively provokes significant changes in public policy because most policies “represent small departures from existing policies (Hayes, 2017, p. 21) and path dependencies severely limit the decision-makers (Hoppe, 2011, pp. 178–179). Moreover, involving a government in new activities generates conflicts across political parties and social interests (Brown, 1983; Colebatch, 2009) and new ideas require developing an understanding of these new policy ideas (Lindblom, 1990). Therefore, a realistic threshold should be rather low. I

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\(^9\) The numbers are

\(^10\) These studies analyse deliberative participatory mechanisms which feature a deliberative process but do not select their participants with random selection
suggest that a high level should be above 25.1%, a moderate level between 10.1 and 25%, and a low level between 0.1 and 9.9%.

Case study and methodology
In order to illustrate how the scale works, I analyse two cases of minipublics, the Citizens’ Panel on Mobility “Brussels—Make your Mobility—(CPM) organized by the Regional Parliament of Brussels in 2017 and the Parents’ Panel on the future of high school education (PPE) organized by the Flemish Regional Minister of Education in 2015 and 2016. Both are relatively similar in their design and are of similar quality. Their purpose was also analogous as they were both convened to provide a Minister with policy ideas about their respective significant policy reforms (Vrydagh et al., Forthcoming).

The analysis of a minipublics’ impact focuses on three temporal dimensions. First, I look at decision-makers’ preferences before the minipublic. For the CPM, I examine the coalition agreement of Brussels’ Regional Government and the political program of the SP.a to which the Minister of Transport Pascal Smet belongs. Regarding the PPE, I also look at the coalition agreement of the Flemish Government and I consider in addition the Minister’s policy note that she drafted at the start of her mandate and in which she presents her policy objectives. It is important to clarify that these policy documents entail policy intentions that serve as a proxy for decision-makers’ true preferences, which are inaccessible (Benoit et al., 2009). Yet, coalition agreements in Belgium provide a reliable access to decision-makers’ positions, as they function as “sacred contracts” between coalition members (Deschouwer, 2012; Walgrave et al., 2006).

Second, I examine the two minipublics’ reports in which randomly selected citizens formulate policy recommendations. I coded proposals based on the operationalization of public policy’s components. The typology of these components proved to be very useful to distinguish between the clear policy demands—mostly policy means and goals—from arguments behind these demands—i.e. the framing. Hence, all items coded in the analysis are called “proposals” even if these refer to reasoning or arguments that belong to framing. Finally, I examine policy documents posterior to minipublics. Regarding the CPM, I analyse the

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11 The PPE gathered 24 randomly selected citizens during three weekends between 2015 and 2016, whereas the CPM saw 40 citizens deliberating during two weekends in 2017 (Vrydagh et al., Forthcoming).
12 I have personally followed the Citizens’ Panel on mobility while I rely on Caluwaerts and Kavadias (2016)’s evaluation report of the Parents’ panel.
13 The Flemish Minister Hilde Crevits (CD&V, centre conservative party) was starting a reform on the objectives that high school education must achieve. Likewise, the Minister of Transport Pascal Smet (SP.a, left progressive party) was launching the Good Move policy plan that shape the mobility policy of the Region for the next 10 years.
mobility plan, a single key document that outlines the whole regional mobility policy for the next 10 years. For the PPE, the search for congruent policy was more complex and demanding because there was no central policy document. Instead, the Minister produced a series of 21 decrees\textsuperscript{14} that amount to almost 3000 pages of legal documents, which must be read and reviewed. The appendix provides an overview of all policy documents taken into account in the analysis. I coded policy preferences for each time dimension with the MAXQDA software.

**Analysis**

This section only presents the aggregated results for both minipublics while the complete detailed analysis can be found in the appendix. For each minipublic, a table provides an overview of the aggregated results. First, CPM’s results are displayed in table 4. It produces 71 recommendations and 33.8% proposals do not have any influence, meanwhile aligning influence count for 50.7% and diverging influence for 15.5%. Since proposals with a diverging influence indicate the extent to which a minipublic has a transformative influence, we can deduce that the CPM slightly exceeds the threshold of 15.1% to belong to the set of a high degree of transformative influence. The CMP also has 32 consequential proposals, which represents 45% of all proposals, and thus indicate a high degree of consequential influence. Finally, we can deduce the degree of authentical influence based on the proportion of proposals with a transformative influence that are also consequential. There are 11 proposals with a diverging influence and 6 of them are consequential. Therefore, with 54.5%, the CPM also belongs to a high category of authentical influence. In order to determine the degree of impact of a whole minipublic, we must consider the principle with the lowest score, since each principle is necessary for the autonomous minipublics’ impact. In this case, the overall impact is high since the CPM obtains a high score in each dimension.

Table 4: Aggregated results for the CPM’s impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aligning influence</th>
<th>Number of proposals</th>
<th>Number of consistent proposals</th>
<th>Aggregated impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No influence</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited continuous</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriching</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited enriching</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovating</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{14} See the list in appendix
Next, the PPE produces more proposals - 147—than its counterpart, as displayed in table 5. It also has more proposals without any congruent public policy, namely 62.3%. Regarding aligning influence, almost a fourth of its proposals were congruent, while diverging influence amount to 15%. Therefore, the PPE also slightly surpasses the threshold of a high transformative influence. With regard to consequential influence, 29.9% of PPE’s proposals were consistently taken up in public policy, which indicates that it has a moderate degree of consequential influence. Finally, when looking at the proportion of proposals with a transformative influence that are consequential, we obtain a very high result, 81.8%, which suggest that the PPE exerted a high degree of authentical influence. As a whole, the PPE has a moderate impact since its lowest membership is the moderate consequential influence.

Table 5: Aggregated results for the PPE’s impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence Type</th>
<th>No influence</th>
<th>Aligning influence</th>
<th>Diverging influence</th>
<th>Aggregated impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No influence</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligning influence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited continuous</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriching</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited enriching</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverging influence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovating</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited innovating</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited shifting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhibiting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The analysis of these two minipublics has a series of implications. First, the analysis shows that the single outcome scale makes sense empirically. Not only does it provide a clear indication of the minipublics’ impact, but also it provides a more fine-grained examination of what and how a minipublic affects public policy. It also effectively aggregates proposals into...
a single outcome which can determine whether a minipublic has a low, moderate or high level of impact.

A close look at the analysis in appendix, especially the congruency between a minipublic’s proposal and both a subsequent public policy and decision-makers’ initial preferences, suggests that the scale may trace a degree of responsiveness than an impact. Impact implies that a minipublic’s proposal causally leads to the adoption of a policy, but the framework does not allow an empirical investigation of such theoretical assumption. For instance, it may advance that a proposal with a continuous influence is consequential, while decision-makers did not actually consider that proposal when converting their political agenda into public policy. The investigation of causality requires methodologies that delve deeper into the case, such as process-tracing. However, such exercise is not the scale’s purpose. It indeed rather seeks to advance the research agenda on minipublics’ impact by problematizing its key concepts—i.e. the impact and congruency—and integrating resulting reflections into a conceptual and analytical framework. Thereby, we can obtain a more robust, systematic and transparent analytical framework that can contribute to a more comparative research agenda.

Furthermore, searching for causality must not need to be the ultimate goal if the scale measures the extent to which public policy is responsive to a minipublic. Whether a minipublic is at the origin of all policies responsive to considered opinions should not be the research agenda’s quest for the holy grail15. Equally important is the perspective that a minipublic can be used as an instrument to measure the extent to which a public policy is responsive to the considered opinions of citizens as formulated by the minipublic (Lafont, 2019, pp. 138–160). Following this responsive approach, analysing minipublics’ impact can greatly contribute to a research agenda of deliberative systems. The single outcome scale can for instance contribute to case studies of coupling (Hendriks, 2016; Mansbridge et al., 2012) as it provides a more fine-grained picture of which ideas from a minipublic successfully fertilize deliberative sites of decision-making.

The study of minipublics’ impact does not, however, become an exact science because we translate the fate of proposals into numbers and percentages. Such analysis still entails a certain degree of subjectivity as exemplified by the coding of a minipublic’s proposal. Minipublics’ reports contain a broad diversity of proposals which can be difficult to systematically code into public policy components. Hence, it is important to emphasize that not only such analysis

15 However, some researchers and practitioners tend to make causal assumptions when there is a congruency with public policy (see Mazeaud & Boas, 2012; Richardson et al., 2019 for a critique).
predominantly relies on a qualitative approach, but also the quantitative results’ display does not take away the degree of subjectivity inherent to this exercise. The calibration of normative influences may also—rightly—be subject to debate. The analysis demonstrates that thresholds are not unrealistic. Whether we can and should increase them requires future empirical research while whether they optimally and fully capture the minipublic’s autonomy needs further theoretical discussion. I hope that this paper stimulates and helps scholars to analyse new cases and to think about what we could expect from minipublics in terms of impact on public policy.

Conclusions
The paper started with a discussion of existing empirical studies on minipublics’ impact. It pointed out the lack of normative account and an aggregation formula to obtain an impact assessment for a whole minipublic. Therefore, it sought to address these issues by proposing a single outcome scale with an explicit normative dimension. The first step consisted of locating the scale regarding the existing theoretical debate, namely Lafont’s criticisms of a minipublic’s decisiveness and both systemic approaches to deliberation and democratic theory. It adopted a problem-based approach, which implies that the normative account must contain a common denominator that applies to all minipublics, regardless of the problem they intend to solve. I therefore suggested that minipublics should always be autonomous regarding decision-makers, that is they should exert an influence on them that is transformative, consequential and authentical. Next, I operationalized these normative principles into two indicators, namely influence and public policy, which discern respectively how a minipublic’s proposal relates to decision-makers’ initial preferences and what it affects in the subsequent public policy.

I then apply the single outcome scale to two minipublics, the Citizens’ Panel on Mobility and the Parents’ Panel on Education. The analysis shows that the framework makes sense empirically as it grasps a more genuine picture of these minipublics’ impact, as the Citizens’ Panel on Mobility achieved a high degree of impact while the Parents’ Panel on Education had a moderate degree of impact. These two case studies are nonetheless insufficient to demonstrate whether the single scale outcome can effectively apply to all minipublics in different institutional settings. Both cases took place in one country on a similar authority level and both feature a similar design. Moreover, the scale calibration entails a degree of subjectivity which can only be decreased to the extent that future empirical and theoretical research can contribute, question and adjust the scale’s normative principles and thresholds. Hence, this research agenda needs more case and comparative studies in order to confirm this paper’s contribution and therewith to advance the normative and theoretical discussion on minipublic’s impact.
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