The Modular Framework
of the Democratic Odyssey:
Preparing, Running and Embedding a Permanent Peoples' Assembly for Europe

PREVIEW (Last update 22 Sep 2023)

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1. Introduction

Welcome to the preview of the "Democratic Odyssey - Preparing, Running, and Embedding a People's Assembly for Europe, Modular Framework." This comprehensive document provides the outline of our initiative aimed at fostering democracy and civic engagement in Europe with the support of a flotilla of friends and a Constituent Network involved in co-designing the process.

2. Key Objectives

Our mission is to help empower European citizens by setting up a modular framework for institutionalising transnational People's Assemblies. Key goals include:

- Enhancing democratic participation transnationally in Europe and beyond
- Encouraging citizen involvement in policymaking.
- Promoting transparency and accountability.
- Strengthening the civic, transborder bonds of European togetherness

3. Modular Framework – the overview

Our framework is built on the two core principles:

- Radical transparency
- Radical openness

The Modular Design allows for flexibility, inclusivity, scalability and customisation, making it adaptable within and across various European contexts. As of 09.23, it consists of 28 modules, but the framework will change over time (table 1):

Table 1 Modular Framework Overview

Co-Design	Imaginary	Initiation	Composition	Sortition
Topics	Session	Formats	Spaces	Logistics
Rules	Facilitation	Hybridity	Expertise	Transnationality
Emotions	Arts	Deliberation	Decision-making	Elected Representatives
Outputs	Public Sphere	Impact	Accountability	Evaluation
Political Buy-in	Institutionalisation	Citizen empowering		

4. Modules 1-28, key features of implementing the European Peoples' Pilot Assembly 2024

Phase 1: Preparing

- Building a diverse Constituent Network
- Engaging stakeholders and partners.
- Co-design a comprehensive sortition process and agenda.

Phase 2: Running

- Implementing a pedagogy of random selection.
- Hosting inclusive, structured deliberations.
- Facilitating transparent decision-making.

Phase 3: Embedding

- Integrating assembly outcomes into EU politics and policies.
- Enhancing the European public sphere
- Ensuring long-term sustainability

I. PREPARING THE TRANSNATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Note: the members of the Constituent Network are involved in forum discussions about each of the modules below. To sign up and become a member please write to: DemocraticOdyssey@eui.eu

Module 1: Co-design

Co-designing democratic innovations involves collaborative efforts with various groups, including citizens, community members, and civil society organizations, to create new ways of involving them in decision-making discussions. It encompasses participatory innovations, where people actively engage in decision-making processes, and deliberative innovations, which focus on improving the quality of discussions. Co-design ensures active participation, making democratic processes more inclusive and effective. The process is guided by a modular framework, proposing different components of citizens' assemblies, for discussing distinct options with their advantages and disadvantages.

Module 2: Imaginaries

Political endeavours like a citizens' assembly for Europe are deeply rooted in cultural contexts and various imaginative visions. Different perspectives and values contribute to diverse imaginaries associated with such an institution, such as stronger democracy, solidarity, empowerment, innovative governance, and more. These imaginaries are influenced by academic and non-academic theories, ranging from utopian to dystopian concepts, reflecting metaphors, images, aspirations, values, and goals.

Module 3: Initiation

Initiating an assembly can mean creating it to address specific issues of a political system or democratic process or starting a discussion on a topic of policymaking. Deciding the actor starting the assembly is crucial for avoiding a top-down process and ensuring ownership. Reflecting on how and by whom the assembly is started, and defining its dedicated purpose or goal, is essential.

Module 4: Composition

Assemblies vary in size and composition, affecting participant representativeness. Participants may come from the 27 EU member states and beyond. Reflection is needed on the number of participants and criteria for structuring the group, shaping the assembly's composition.

Module 5: Sortition

This module explores the use of randomness in selecting assembly participants as the primary task and for secondary purposes. Sortition is distinct from other selection procedures like voting, market mechanisms, and examination based on criteria. It introduces an element of "uncertainty" and chance into the decision-making process, bypassing actors' will.

Module 6: Topics

Selecting topics for European citizens' assembly deliberations is a complex task reflecting diverse interests and concerns. The choice of topics depends on the assembly's goals, time available, and pressing European issues. Involving experts, stakeholders, and the public in topic choice is crucial for a well-rounded agenda. Resource and time constraints must be considered to find the number and complexity of topics, with the goal of addressing pressing issues and fostering open dialogue.

Module 7: Sessions

Finding the exact number and duration of sessions for a citizens' assembly depends on several factors, including the assembly's goals, topic complexity, the need for external expertise, and participants' availability and ability for sustained engagement. Striking a balance between supplying ample time for meaningful deliberation and avoiding participant fatigue and logistical challenges is crucial. Some assemblies may choose a mix of in-person and virtual sessions to accommodate diverse geographical locations while supporting impactful outcomes. Flexibility and adaptability are essential for designing a successful transnational citizens' assembly. Various models of deliberation meetings, such as small working groups and plenaries, are grouped into sessions, and this module reflects on the frequency of these sessions.

II. RUNNING THE TRANSNATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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Module 8: Formats

Deliberations in citizens' assemblies involve participants coming together to articulate, listen to, and debate different views. Besides the Citizens' Assembly format, deliberative processes can

take various other formats, varying in function, size, and duration. These formats include 21st Century Town Meetings, Planning Cells, Focus Groups, RoundTable discussions, Delphi Foresight Panels, and Public Expert Hearings, among others. While a transnational citizens' assembly meets certain criteria, it can employ diverse formats during its sessions to ease productive discussions, decision-making, and participant engagement, depending on its goals and topic complexity. Flexibility in choosing formats is important to accommodate a geographically dispersed audience.

Module 9: Spaces

Spaces adapted for inclusive, lively, and horizontal citizen participation are currently lacking in our western societies. Existing political spaces often have asymmetric power dynamics, with some speaking from a podium while others listen below. These spaces may not be conducive to deliberative democracy. The quality of deliberation depends on participant well-being, where all feel included and able to express their opinions. This module highlights the importance of designing spaces that promote inclusivity, considering the symbolic weight they carry.

Module 10: Logistics

A transnational citizens' assembly with randomly selected participants faces several logistic challenges. These challenges include coordinating time zones, ensuring reliable internet connections, overcoming language barriers, and addressing real-time translation needs. Ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for participants with disabilities can be complex. Handling sensitive data and keeping data privacy across borders poses legal and security concerns. Other logistical considerations include supplying technical support, fostering cultural understanding among diverse participants, organizing physical gatherings or hybrid events if needed, securing funding, and addressing potential biases in the random selection process.

Module 11: Procedural Rules

A European citizens' assembly requires comprehensive procedural rules to ensure fair and effective operation. These rules encompass fair selection and composition of assembly members, transparent agenda-setting, deliberation, and decision-making processes, public engagement mechanisms, impartial facilitation and moderation guidelines, transparent resource allocation procedures, and clear protocols for reporting, recommendations, follow-up, and evaluation. Customized to the assembly's specific mandate and operating context, these rules are essential for promoting inclusivity, transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and the impact of recommendations on European policymaking.

Module 12: Facilitation

Facilitation and moderation in a citizens' assembly prioritize selecting facilitators or moderators who prove impartiality and ability in managing diverse perspectives. These facilitators should be chosen through a transparent and merit-based process. Rules should be set up for conflict resolution, promoting a respectful and inclusive atmosphere, and ensuring all participants have equal opportunities to express their views. Facilitators and moderators should undergo training in conflict management, effective communication, and cultural sensitivity to keep a constructive and unbiased environment during deliberations, enhancing the assembly's credibility and fostering productive discussions among participants.

Module 13: Hybridity

Transnational citizens' assemblies need to combine online and offline deliberations. This module describes how online deliberations can be incorporated and what role they will play in the assembly. Although offline experiences are sometimes considered less engaging, hybrid modes can reduce costs and offer advantages. Various digital tools can be used, including video conferencing, online forums, collaborative document editing, surveys, secure voting platforms, translation services, virtual whiteboards, webinars, data analysis tools, and more. The choice of tools should prioritize inclusivity, data security, user-friendliness, and alignment with the assembly's principles and aims.

Module 14: Expertise

To ensure enlightened deliberation, citizens need training for their ability on the topic under discussion. This training, often led by topic experts, occurs in the first stages of the assembly but can continue throughout the process. It may involve lectures, access to relevant materials, or expert presentations. Deciding who supplies expert input can be a subject of discussion, as different experts may advocate different viewpoints. Experts may come from various backgrounds, including academia, professions, journalism, or anyone with practical knowledge. The selection process for experts is also critical, with some assemblies having experts chosen by the organizing committee, while others allow citizens to select them. Additionally, the format of expert delivery affects the role of experts in the process. This module explores how to design this training process.

Module 15: Transnationality

Transnational citizens' assemblies, compared to national ones, face unique requirements and challenges due to their cross-border nature. These include effective multilingualism, cultural sensitivity, complex legal frameworks, fair representation among EU member states, balancing

national interests with EU goals, transparency, innovative public outreach, coordination with existing EU institutions, legal status and enforcement, diverse policy areas, fair cross-border voting mechanisms, and robust digital infrastructure for remote participation. Addressing these challenges is crucial for transnational assemblies to engage in inclusive and informed deliberation on issues that transcend national boundaries while upholding democratic principles and values. Strategies for mitigating these challenges are essential for fostering an inclusive and informed deliberative environment.

Module 16: Emotions

In contrast to bureaucratic or technocratic stakeholder participation, a transnational citizens' assembly looks to address and incorporate emotions into its processes. Engaging deliberations can involve emotionally stimulating formats such as music, theatre, dance, simulation games, debates, art, and influencers, among others. By incorporating empathetic and emotionally intelligent practices, a transnational citizens' assembly can effectively address subjective emotions. This includes structured storytelling, emotionally inclusive facilitation, empathy-building exercises, artistic expression, and dedicated time for emotional reflection. Emotionally intelligent approaches help participants connect on a deeper level, fostering empathy and understanding among diverse individuals. Acknowledging and validating subjective emotions can create a more inclusive and empathetic deliberative environment, leading to more nuanced policy recommendations.

Module 17: Arts

Artistic practices can play a significant role in enhancing the deliberative process within transnational citizens' assemblies. Arts offer unique opportunities for developing imaginaries and empathy, making deliberation deep and reflective. They also serve an educational role by connecting the audience with both factual and emotional aspects of the issues discussed. While recognizing the instrumental value of arts in democratic engagement, it's essential not to overshadow the intrinsic value of art. Artistic practices, including visual arts, theatre, music, and storytelling, can help more inclusive and accessible dialogue, transcending language and cultural barriers. They can inject energy and enthusiasm into the assembly, making it a more engaging and dynamic forum for deliberation. By incorporating artistic practices, transnational citizens' assemblies can tap into a broader range of human experiences and perspectives, enriching the democratic process and promoting innovative solutions to complex problems.

Module 18: Deliberation

Deliberation in citizens' assemblies is considered of good quality when it satisfies two evaluative criteria: procedural and epistemic. The procedural criterion requires deliberation to enable each

citizen to express themselves equally in a safe, inclusive environment, regulated by norms of conduct. The epistemic criterion involves producing accessible results, generally non-binding recommendations, based on reasonable, rational, and justifiable criteria that serve the common good. Good deliberation ensures participants have sufficient, reliable, and objective information to produce fact-based arguments and improve the quality of public discourse. High-quality deliberation is reached when it's based on the "forceless force of the better argument," according to Jürgen Habermas.

Module 19: Decision-making

This module focuses on the decision-making process within the citizens' assembly. Once potential solutions are presented, it's crucial to verify consensus among participants and decide which proposed solutions to jointly recommend. Establishing a fair voting system is essential to reflect the prevailing opinions. Options for voting include consensus-based decision-making, supermajority voting, or simple majority voting, depending on the desired level of consensus and the assembly's goals. Alternatively, the assembly can supply advisory recommendations to policymakers who make final decisions based on these inputs. The choice of voting mode depends on the assembly's specific circumstances and goals.

Module 20: Elected Representatives

In contrast to electoral representative democracy, a transnational citizens' assembly stands for a participatory, deliberative approach. Thus, considerations arise about its relationship with existing elected representative institutions in the EU. A standing European Citizens' Assembly can set up various potential relationships with these institutions. These relationships might involve acting as a complementary deliberative body, offering non-binding advice, overseeing policy implementation, informing legislative agendas, fostering policy innovation, enhancing public engagement, easing conflict resolution, proposing amendments to legislation, playing an educational role, and even discussing constitutional reforms. The nature of these relationships depends on the assembly's mandate, legal framework, and the willingness of elected representatives to collaborate, potentially leading to more inclusive, informed, and transparent EU governance.

Module 21: Outputs

A transnational assembly of randomly selected citizens can produce various outputs. Firstly, it may generate well-informed and balanced policy recommendations or decisions on complex issues, benefiting from diverse citizen perspectives. These outputs can serve as valuable inputs to policymakers and government bodies, influencing policies and legislation. Secondly, the assembly's deliberations can enhance civic education by raising awareness and understanding of

transnational challenges. Thirdly, it can foster a sense of collective ownership and empowerment among citizens, encouraging ongoing engagement in democratic processes. Lastly, the assembly's deliberations can promote transparency and accountability in governance, strengthening democratic practices and legitimacy. This module discusses the types of outputs the assembly will produce, such as recommendations, participants' stories, or cultural events, to better reach the broader public.

III. EMBEDDING THE TRANSNATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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Module 22: Public Sphere

While citizens' assemblies often run within a protected deliberative environment, there's a need for greater public awareness and literacy about what these assemblies are and their implications. Engaging a broader European public in discussions about specific deliberations could empower each assembly, extending its social, cultural, and discursive impact beyond policymaking. This module emphasizes the importance of engaging the broader public sphere to enhance the reach and influence of citizens' assemblies.

Module 23: Impact

Transnational citizens' assemblies hold the potential for significant impacts on democratic decision-making and governance. These impacts include enhancing democratic legitimacy through diverse and representative participation, leading to informed and well-reasoned decisions, fostering cross-border collaboration, positively influencing public attitudes, and motivating active civic participation. The module discusses the potential impacts of the assembly on the European ecosystem, depending on whether its outputs have binding power and how they might shape policies, initiatives, and campaigns.

Module 24: Accountability

Organizing the accountability of a standing transnational people's assembly requires a robust framework to build trust and legitimacy. Key elements include clear and inclusive membership criteria, a designated body for facilitating discussions and decision-making, a code of conduct and

ethical guidelines, regular reporting mechanisms, transparency through digital platforms, and mechanisms for oversight. These components collectively enhance accountability and ensure adherence to proven principles, fostering trust in the assembly's proceedings.

Module 25: Evaluation

Evaluating transnational citizens' assemblies, aimed at fostering cross-border collaboration and democratic deliberation, is crucial for assessing their impact and effectiveness. Various evaluation tools and methods can be employed, such as surveys, deliberative polling, content analysis, participant observation, case studies, social network analysis, process observers, and external assessors. The choice of tools depends on the goals, available resources, and desired level of detail. Combining multiple tools can supply a comprehensive assessment, refining the assembly's design and impact on democratic decision-making in a transnational context.

Module 26: Political Buy-in

"Political buy-in" refers to the level of support or commitment shown by political stakeholders toward a running an EPA, committing to a serious follow-up on its outputs, that is recommendations or decisions. This is crucial for securing resources, cooperation, and consensus needed for successful implementation. This module explores the modes and conditions for political buy-in and how it influences the success of projects and initiatives for running and embedding a transnational citizens' assembly.

Module 27: Institutionalization

Institutionalizing a standing European Citizens' Assembly requires political will, legal reforms, and extensive public engagement. It involves commitments from EU member states and institutions to set up a legal framework defining the assembly's mandate, powers, and structure. Preparation includes transparent processes for selecting by lot a stratified sample of diverse citizens, creating secure digital platforms, ensuring multilingual accessibility, and securing funding and resources. Robust communication, civic education initiatives, and public consultations are vital for building awareness and trust. Continuous evaluation and adaptation mechanisms are essential for keeping the assembly's relevance and effectiveness.

Module 28: Citizen Empowerment

This module addresses citizen empowerment in the context of citizens' assemblies. It examines the extent and nature of empowerment within these assemblies and highlights the many ways in which assemblies relate to power, including inequalities of voice, asymmetries of knowledge, and disparities in political authority. Citizen empowerment takes different forms and may occur

at various stages of the assembly event. The module encourages further reflection on these dynamics of empowerment.

5. Press Contact

For further information and press inquiries, please contact our media contacts at the following address:

DemocraticOdyssey@EUI.eu

6.The Online Knowledge-Hub

For the Democratic Odyssey's ONLINE KNOWLEDGE-HUB (in progress), please register for ZOTERO LIBRARY GROUP .

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