

Chapter Four

The Macro Political Uptake of the G1000 in Belgium

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After the election of 2010, Belgium attracted the interest of the international media because the kingdom went on to set the world record for a country without a government (541 days). More precisely, parties were unable to find an agreement on a potential reform of the federal architecture of the kingdom. In the context of the consociational nature of the political decision-making process in Belgium, a compromise is needed between the French-speaking and Dutch-speaking parties in order to form a government. However, since 2010, divergent opinions concerning state-reform between northern and southern areas had deprived the country of a fully functioning federal government for a prolonged period.²

In this context of a crisis of electoral institutions and government-formation, a group of citizens decided to ‘do something’. After an appeal³ by the writer David Van Reybrouck and the journalist Paul Hermant, a new team, composed of leaders of foundations, business-people and academics, implemented a large-scale deliberative process. The project did not seek to offer a radical alternative to representative democracy but rather to complement and breathe new life into it. It aimed to gather ordinary citizens in a setting that was conducive to open and non-coercive deliberation on possibly contentious social and political issues. The central idea was to facilitate citizens themselves experiencing the difficulty of building bridges and compromising over highly polarising issues. The deliberation was structured in three distinct phases: a phase of online public consultation; a citizen-summit (for a large-scale deliberation); and a citizen-panel (for an in-depth deliberation).

The G1000 in Belgium cannot be categorised as a form of constitutional deliberative democracy *per se*, in that it was never intended as a means to change the constitution. Its organisers explicitly sought to avoid any political and institutional ties and their focus was much more on guaranteeing best possible representativeness and a high quality of deliberation, rather than generating a strong political outcome (G1000 2012). So, while the G1000 did well in terms of representativeness and open agenda-setting (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2015), political uptake was very limited in the short term. However, the event put on

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1. The authors were members of the Methodology and Research Unit of the G1000. They have been involved in the designing of the G1000.
 2. The country was without a fully functioning government from 26 April 2010 to 5 December 2011.
 3. The website <http://g1000.org> contains full information and the appeal can be read in English at <http://g1000.org/en/manifesto.php>.

the political agenda the issue of democratic innovation, both in the discourse of political actors and in the practices of citizen-participation.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the potential impact of grassroots deliberative mechanisms such as the G1000. We first describe the deliberative design of the event and analyse its legitimacy by distinguishing the input, throughput and the output dimensions. We continue with an in-depth assessment of its political effect by looking at the uptake of its ideas in the media, the maxi-public and conventional political and social arenas.

The G1000

The G1000 aimed to offer a forum for large-scale deliberation in Belgium. In order to live up to its aspirations of inclusion and openness, the G1000 consisted of three phases. The first was an online public consultation, in which every volunteer was invited to propose an issue for discussion in the second phase, a citizen-summit, which consisted of a large, one-day deliberative ‘mini-public’, among 1000 participants randomly selected from inhabitants of the country. The third phase was a more in-depth citizen-panel, to which thirty-two citizens were invited to deliberate and agree precise proposals for public policies.

Phase 1: public consultation

The first phase consisted of a very open process of agenda-setting. The organisers did not determine the agenda of the citizen summit, in contrast to the common practice in deliberative ventures (Kies and Nanz 2013). Rather, they were convinced of the importance of starting with an open agenda, which would be populated entirely by the public itself. They therefore launched a large-scale online ‘idea-box’, in which every citizen, no matter his or her opinion or background, could post the questions or problems that they believed should be deliberated at the G1000 citizen-summit. Moreover, they could also rate the ideas and proposals of others, allowing a more accurate reading of the salience of issues.

This process resulted in a total of over 2000 ideas, dealing with all kinds of social, political and economic issues. In total, more than 6000 people took part in this procedure. As most of the proposals appeared several times in the list, the ideas were subsequently clustered into twenty-five themes, based on the number of times they appeared and their individual rating. This list of twenty-five was placed online in October 2011 for a further round of public voting. In order to avoid a bias in the results, the twenty-five ideas appeared in a random order on the screen, so that the organisers had no influence on the final agenda. Through the media and via a large public campaign, citizens were invited to vote for their three preferred themes for the G1000, which turned out to be social security; welfare in a time of economic crisis; and immigration.⁴ This large-scale public consultation

4. All the results are presented in the final report of the G1000, which is available on the website at: www.g1000.org (accessed 8 February 2016).

and the voting tool for the top twenty-five guaranteed that the agenda of the G1000 was open.⁵

Phase 2: citizen-summit

Following the public-consultation phase, the second part of the project consisted of a large-scale citizen-deliberation, the G1000 citizen-summit. Through a mixture of random selection and targeted recruitment (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2015), 1000 citizens were invited to participate in a one-day deliberative event in Brussels, in order to reflect on and discuss their positions about the three issues that had been chosen during the public-consultation phase. Participants were randomly seated by roundtables of ten and experienced volunteers facilitated the discussion at each of the tables.

The G1000 event in Brussels was flanked by two side projects: G'Home and G'Offs. The former was a software application that served as a forum for online discussion while the latter provided local events for citizens to gather and discuss the same issues as in citizen-summit itself. The participant pool of the G'Homes and G'Offs was based entirely on self-selection. However, the chance to take part in local initiatives or even at home did lower the threshold for participation and allow a much larger group than those gathered in Brussels to discuss the same issues. To this end, there was a live stream of the event in Brussels, which was available online.

Phase 3: citizen-panel

The third phase of the G1000 project, also known as the G32, aimed at elaborating the ideas that came out the discussions at the citizen-summit. After all, the citizen-summit was a large event designed to facilitate the pooling and sharing of ideas. Given the fact that each round was relatively short and focused on exploring the diversity around the tables, the ideas and proposals made were, at that stage, still quite basic.

For three weekends, thirty-two participants gathered to work out policy proposals. These thirty-two citizens were randomly selected from a pool of 491 participants in the G1000, G'Offs and G'Home who agreed to be considered as potential G32 participants, which meant the significant time-commitment of participating in each of the three weekends. The stratified random selection of the thirty-two from the pool of the 491 participants was done with controls for diversity in terms of gender (sixteen women and sixteen men); language (eighteen Dutch-speaking, twelve French-speaking and two German-speaking); region (from each of the ten Belgian provinces and Brussels) and age (seven participants under thirty; nine between thirty and forty-five; nine between forty-five and sixty; and seven over sixty).

5. There was also an *ex post* IP check to prevent massive voting by a single individual or group.

The G32 took the format of a citizen-panel, which is used in policy processes throughout the world, such as in citizens' juries in the USA (Crosby and Nethercut 2005) or 'planning cells' in Germany (Garbe 1986). Such a deliberative design is much more intensive, since participants endeavour to propose specific policies and actions. A citizen-panel is also more open than a citizen-summit, since the participants have a much greater say in the process itself. In fact, citizens have the authority to decide what they wish to work on (the choice of the specific questions they want to tackle); how they want to work (the choice of the experts and stakeholders they wish to question); and, above all, on what they decide and then bring to the public debate.

Input, throughput and output legitimacy

In this chapter, mobilising the typology presented in Suiter and Reuchamps 2016, Chapter One of this volume, we analyse the legitimacy of the G1000 in three steps: the input, the throughput and the output, with a focus on the macro-uptake of its recommendations in the assessment of the output legitimacy.

Input legitimacy

The selection of participants is always a key question for the organisers of deliberative mini-publics. From an epistemic point of view, random selection is the best-suited selection technique (Caluwaerts and Ugarriza 2012). The organisers of G1000 wanted a large-scale deliberation with ordinary citizens and thus opted for random selection. The aim was to give to every inhabitant of the country the same probability to be selected for the G1000.

Practically, the participants were selected using Random Digit Dialling. As other authors have noticed, the use of random selection does not prevent the effect of self-selection (Smith 2009; Fung 2007). In order to mitigate this, the organisers also used quotas on gender, province and language in order to have a more appropriate representation of the Belgian population. In addition, and perhaps even more importantly, 10 per cent of the seats were reserved for a targeted recruitment of groups of people less likely to take up the opportunity to participate. For example, homeless people can be very difficult to attract with phone calls, and the G1000 therefore contacted local associations to help them to include this segment of the population. The idea behind all these efforts was to create the most inclusive process possible. As Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2015) contend, the G1000's quality of representation requires a qualified assessment. The use of random selection, quotas and some targeted recruitment brought a very diverse group of participants, which was a feature highly praised by the international observers:

one of the most impressive features of the G1000 was the diversity of participants in terms of gender, age, political preferences as well as social, professional and cultural background. We were also impressed by the inclusion

of diverse faith communities and the fair representation of Belgium's different language communities (G1000 2012: 102).

The selection of the issues to be discussed in the G1000 was also driven by the aim to give voice to citizens. Particularly in the first phase, everyone had the opportunity to propose issues: this openness of the agenda was possible because of the autonomy of the G1000. Contrary to the Irish and Icelandic cases, the G1000 was not mandated by public authorities and was not embedded in formal political processes. This high level of openness is positive in terms of input but it can also be an obstacle to implementation of the outcomes, thus weakening output legitimacy; we explore this issue in greater detail later in the chapter.

Throughput legitimacy

The G1000 focused strongly on the quality of the deliberative process. This process was organised and managed by volunteers with professional skills as facilitators; their task was to ensure, to the greatest extent possible, equal consideration of all opinions represented at the table. Each roundtable began with an introduction of all participants in order to create a setting conducive to respectful exchange. Experts were also invited to feed the discussion with substantive information at the plenary discussion. Their role was to provide a minimum context of common knowledge on the issues at stake but not to impose a specific framing. During the G1000, two academics spoke on each of the three themes of the day. Nevertheless, according to the international observers, the presentations from the experts were not quite diverse enough. 'From what we have understood, we find that the keynotes were slightly biased; the experts who introduced the three themes approached the matter from a somewhat "left-wing" oriented perspective' (G1000 2012: 103). This is a key element because good deliberation needs to build on a plurality of points of view (Ryfe 2005). Yet the same observers pointed out that the impact of the experts on the discussions was not very substantial in the end and that the outcomes of the votes after the deliberation were not merely reflections of the experts' presentations. For the third phase, the G32, the process was more open in terms of experts. Indeed the participants were invited to choose themselves whom they wanted to invite. This meant that they met not only academics but also members of lobbies and think-tanks as well as businessmen and representatives from a range of associations.

To be sure, time-constraints hindered the full development of deliberation over these three complex issues. Thus, in comparison to mini-publics that take place over several weekends, the throughput legitimacy assessment is lower for the G1000. It is also always difficult to grasp the quality of the deliberation. The Discourse Quality Index (DQI) is often used in this regard (Steiner *et al.* 2004). The coding using DQI of a random selection of tables at the G1000 did show an equal quality of deliberation across them (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2014b), due to the fact that each table was following the same script. Another measure is also possible: the Perceived Discourse Quality Index (PDQI). This index, built

from the answers given by the participants to a *post facto* questionnaire, was quite high, with participants giving a positive evaluation of the quality of deliberation (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2014b). The perceived quality of deliberation was even higher during the three weekends of the G32, as participants had more time to ponder the issues at stake.

Finally, we have to look at the balance between aggregation and deliberation during the G1000 in order to evaluate a third dimension of throughput legitimacy. During the G1000, each table had to send all its ideas to a central desk, which then clustered them. But, as pointed out elsewhere, clustering is never a wholly neutral activity:

after all, the experts at the central desk were asked to do a first clustering of the inputs from the tables in order to see which ideas were introduced and to facilitate the voting round. As such, some genuinely innovative and original ideas, which only appeared once or twice, did not make it to the final vote, and the post-test questionnaire indicated that some of the participants felt like their opinions were not taken seriously, because their ideas were not put to the vote (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2015: 161).

This is a risk that lots of deliberative mini-publics face because every discussion needs to be summarised to some extent. The crucial issue, therefore, is to make this step more transparent. During the third phase, the thirty-two citizens were invited to write the proposals themselves. At each stage, people were invited to propose sentences for the proposals and also to critique and amend their wording. In this situation, there was little opportunity for the organisers to manipulate the process because participants could change the proposed text. Also, at the end of the process, votes were held on every proposal. All in all, the throughput legitimacy of the G1000 was quite good, especially if one takes into account all three phases and not only the second phase, the citizen-summit.

Output legitimacy

What were the outputs of the mini-public? This is probably one of the most critical questions for any deliberative endeavour. Just a few days after the G1000, Edouard Delruelle, a Belgian philosopher, explained that the G1000 had no future because it was not about politics *per se*.⁶ According to him, politics is about class conflict and is a struggle between organised groups. The question then becomes: has the G1000 had any influence on politics or policies in Belgium?

When looking at the possible uptake of mini-publics, we must clearly distinguish between two kinds of impact: on the public-policy content of different authorities and on agenda-setting with respect to the public debate. According to Goodin and Dryzek,

6. 'Le G 1000, maladie infantile de la démocratie postmoderne?', *RTBF*, 15 June 2011. All news reports referred to in the following footnotes are available through the websites listed after the References at the end of the chapter.

when it comes to the macro-political impact of micro-political innovations, mini-publics of the sort here in view rarely determine public policy (though more than direct impact on the content of public policy will turn out to be an issue, we shall be arguing). Generally they can have real political impact only by working on and through the broader public sphere, ordinary institutions of representative democracy, and administrative policy making (2006: 220–1).

It should not come as a surprise that, from its very conception, the G1000 was to be a citizen-led initiative, with no ties to formal decision-making institutions. The desire to stay independent from traditional political authorities reduced the likelihood that the conclusions of its deliberation would be translated into concrete public policies. There was no obligation for members of the government to take the report into account; no proposal for referendums; and no place for deliberation between participants and politicians. The presence of the presidents of the different parliaments of Belgium during the final session of the G1000 seems to be the only – weak – link with the formal process of political decision-making (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2015). Analysing causality in the content of public policy is always difficult but we can argue that the weight of the G1000’s proposal was, in practice, negligible in the content of public policies in Belgium.

Does this imply that the G1000 was an island of deliberation largely isolated from the real politics that influence citizens in their everyday lives? Several elements show that the G1000 has influenced public debate in Belgium on one central topic: democratic renewal. That is the major justification provided by the initiators of the project (G1000 2012). The G1000 has given a clear example, which gained huge media attention. It embodied the demand for deliberative democracy. This role of agenda-setting is observable in different places and can be analysed using the classical distinction between the systemic and governmental agenda (Cobb and Elder 1983). The *systemic* agenda describes all the issues commonly perceived as important by members of the political community. Hereafter, we will show that the G1000 has received lots of attention from plenty of actors in Belgium, much more than previous deliberative mini-publics, in terms of media uptake, maxi-public uptake and social uptake. The *governmental* agenda consists of what is taken into account by public authorities at the international, national, regional or local levels, which we will refer to as conventional political uptake. The next sections analyse each of these uptakes. Thus, following the systemic approach to deliberative democracy (Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012), the aim of the remainder of this chapter is to analyse the interaction between the G1000 (its input and throughput) with the entire political system, by looking at the relationship with the media, public opinion, political parties and MPs and with other experiments in deliberative democracy.

The media uptake

In order to grasp the character of media coverage of the G1000, we have analysed all the articles published in Dutch- and French-speaking newspapers in Belgium

that covered the G1000, over the period from June 2011 (when the initiative was launched) to December 2013. This section is divided into three parts: first, the period before the citizen-summit of the G1000 period, that is, from 10 June to 10 November 2011; second, the period between 11 November 2011 and 9 November 2012, which corresponds to the second and the third phase of the G1000; third, the post-G1000 period.

Before the G1000 (10 June to 10 November 2011)

The G1000 was covered in all the major newspapers in the country on 10 June 2011.⁷ The articles all mentioned the citizens' initiative, rooted in the perception that the inability of politicians to form a federal government for almost a year was not because of communal tensions but rather because Belgium's current form of democracy was unsuited to the twenty-first century. The next day, 11 June 2011, the presentation by the G1000 group of its Manifesto also received extensive media coverage.⁸ In the following days, various articles mentioned the importance of launching such an initiative and the popular support for it.⁹ In the weeks and months that followed, however, media interest decreased.

From the beginning of October and, to a greater extent, in November, the G1000 became the centre of media attention once again, with a multiplicity of articles focused on the upcoming event.¹⁰ In the midst of this, some articles focused on the financial problems of the G1000,¹¹ which was a crowd-funded initiative (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2012).

The political context explains the large number of articles dealing with the G1000. When the G1000 was launched in June 2011, the country had been waiting for the formation of a federal government for almost one year (Deschouwer and Reuchamps 2013). This political situation opened a window of opportunity for the G1000, which positioned itself explicitly as a citizen-led alternative to the complete political stalemate in Parliament. Moreover, despite the emergence of

7. 'La journée', *La Libre*, 10 June 2011; '1 jaar politieke crisis: "Huidige democratie is als een koets op de E40"', *De Morgen*, 10 June 2011; 'Un G1000 pour sortir de la crise', *Le Soir*, 10 June 2011; 'David Van Reybrouck lanceert politiek burgerinitiatief', *De Standaard*, 10 June 2011.

8. 'Belges, exprimez-vous!', *La Libre*, 11 June 2011; 'Le G1000 veut réunir mille citoyens le 11/11/11', *Le Soir*, 11 June 2011; 'Democratie 2.0', *De Standaard*, 11 June 2011; 'Droom', *De Standaard*, 11 June 2011; 'Burgerinitiatief rond David Van Reybrouck moet Belgische politiek hervomen', *De Standaard*, 11 June 2011; 'Manifest van de G1000', *De Morgen*, 11 June 2011.

9. 'Meer dan 2500 handtekeningen voor politiek burgerinitiatief', *De Standaard*, 13 June 2011; 'Zinnige burgerinspraak', *De Standaard*, 18 June 2011; 'Les grandes espérances du G 1000', *La Dernière Heure*, 23 June 2011.

10. 'Le G1000 est bien sur les rails', *La Libre*, 4 October 2011; 'Dernière ligne droite avec le sommet citoyen du G1000', *Le Vif*, 7 October 2011; 'Des Belges lancent le "sommet citoyen" du G1000', *Le Soir*, 4 November 2011; 'G1000 buigt zich over sociale zekerheid, welvaart en immigratie', *De Standaard*, 8 November 2011.

11. 'G1000 zoekt nog 180.000 euro financiering voor werking', *De Standaard*, 8 November 2011; 'Un "petit déficit" de 28000 euros', *La Libre*, 9 November; 'Les gros sous du G1000', *Le Soir*, 9 November 2011.

several protest movements (for example, SHAME; the Belgian Fries Revolution; Camping 16) during the government-formation process, the G1000 was one of the main initiatives that formulated clear demands and a clear alternative. These features triggered media interest.

During the G1000 (11 November 2011 to 10 November 2012)

The second phase should be divided into two distinct periods: coverage of the second phase of the G1000, the citizen-summit of 11 November 2011; and coverage of the third phase – the citizen-panel – which did not receive as much media attention. The extensive media-coverage that preceded the citizen-summit continued after the event itself, with an overall positive slant: it was a ‘re-enchantment of Belgian democracy’¹² according to *Le Soir* and described as a ‘successful first citizen-summit’¹³ by *La Libre*. However, some did not hesitate to criticise ‘the quality of sandwiches, coffee and the amount of toilets’ and the low turnout for the event.¹⁴ This topic raised different reactions. Indeed, there was a large difference in the number of participants according to various news sources: according to *Le Vif*, ‘850 participants’¹⁵ attended the event, while the *Gazet van Antwerpen* reported that there were ‘more than 1200 participants’.¹⁶ According to the organisers of the G1000 there were 704 participants. These discrepancies are because some journalists included the volunteers that attended the event whereas others did not.

As the G1000 entered its third phase, thirty-two people were selected to further develop the results of the second phase but this sparked relatively little media interest.¹⁷ Before this, there was a brief resurgence of G1000 media coverage on three separate occasions: the media covered problems of fundraising¹⁸ and deliberations over where the G32 would take place and highlighted the dissolution of the G1000 and its formal integration into an existing Foundation.¹⁹ However, these three topics of media interest were not directly related to the deliberation itself. Aside from these elements, the G32 was largely neglected by the media. This contrasts sharply with the enthusiasm of the media for the second phase of the G1000. There are two possible explanations for this. First, media interest in the G1000 might have derived from the absence of a federal government for such

12. ‘Le G1000 “rénchant” la démocratie belge’, *Le Soir*, 12 November 2011.

13. ‘Un premier sommet citoyen réussi’, *La Libre*, 12 November 2011.

14. ‘De G1000-democratie kampt met thuisblijvers’, *De Standaard*, 12 November 2011.

15. ‘G1000: Environ 850 participants présents à Tour & Taxis’, *Le Vif*, 11 November 2011.

16. ‘Meer dan 1.200 deelnemers voor G1000’, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 11 November 2011.

17. ‘Slotweekend voor G1000’, *De Standaard*, 10 November 2012; ‘G1000 : le bout du tunnel’, *Le Soir*, 14 November 2012; ‘G1000: l’apothéose’, *La Libre*, 9 November 2012.

18. ‘Burgerinitiatief G1000 op zoek naar 75.000 euro’, *De Morgen*, 6 March 2012; ‘Le G1000 poursuivra l’effort’, *La Libre*, 8 March 2012; ‘Le G1000 en rade’, *Le Soir*, 8 March 2012.

19. ‘G1000 ruilt Burgertop in voor Stichting voor Toekomstige Generaties’, *Knack*, 19 Augustus 2012; ‘G1000-vzw opgeheven’, *De Tijd*, 19 August 2012; ‘Le G1000 dissous pour mieux se fondre dans une Fondation’, *Le Soir*, 20 August 2012.

a prolonged period. On 6 December 2011, Elio Di Rupo was sworn in as prime minister and Belgium finally had a federal government, which could have led to a gradual shift in media coverage. A second possible explanation is that the G1000 was a more interesting topic for the media to cover while it brought together a large number of people for one single day – the citizen-summit – than when it convened a small group of people for three weekends – the citizen-panel. This analysis is in line with Parkinson's (2006) evaluation of using media in deliberative democracy.

After the G1000 (11 November 2012 to 31 December 2013)

The last period starts with the presentation of the final report of the G1000. In the days following the G32, the media covered the content of the report and, more specifically, the willingness of participants to address some key political issues, such as automatic wage-indexation and the thorny issue of economic policy in Belgium.²⁰ After this, though a few articles still referred to the experience of the G1000,²¹ overall, we note that with the exception of the week following the presentation of the report, the G1000 quickly disappeared from the Belgian media.

What can be concluded from this analysis of the media coverage of the G1000? It is possible to distinguish variation in the coverage according to the different G1000 phases. The 'before' phase was characterised by extensive media coverage. The 'between' phase started with strong exposure of the citizen-summit of 11 November 2011 but there was relatively little coverage of the G32 citizen-panel. The 'after' phase saw little coverage in the days succeeding the event and interest then evaporated due to the constant flow of new information on other topics. One crucial factor, the political crisis, seems to help explain the coverage of the G1000. As the G1000 was initiated in a context of high political tension it was seen as a possible alternative to traditional parliamentary politics. There was, therefore, a window of opportunity for the G1000 to capture media attention. Afterwards, media coverage reverted to its usual focus on formal politics.

The maxi-public uptake

Besides looking at how media reacted to the G1000, it is equally important to determine how much public support the G1000 garnered. After all, if the G1000 wants its results/proposals to be significant at a macro-political level, there has to be support for the G1000 in the wider public sphere. As Goodin and Dryzek argue

20. 'G1000 legt politici conclusies voor', *Het Belang van Limburg*, 11 November 2012; 'G1000 ziet geen heil in indexsprong', *De Standaard*, 11 November 2012; 'La fusée citoyenne belge est bel et bien sur orbite', *La Libre*, 12 November 2012; 'Le G1000 contre un saut d'index', *La Libre*, 12 November 2012; 'G1000 of de kracht van burgerdemocratie', *De Morgen*, 12 November 2012.

21. 'La démocratie change terriblement', *Le Soir*, 12 December 2012; 'G1000-bedenker Didier Caluwaerts trekt met onderzoeksbeurzen naar VS', *Knack*, 5 April 2013; 'Participatie is geen modegril', *De Morgen*, 13 October 2013.

(2006), only with large-scale public support can the proposals of any deliberative event reach the decision-making sphere; and only with a strong endorsement of the results in the wider public sphere can the mini-public legitimately claim to be heard. This is why we conducted a survey among the general public in Belgium in order to determine whether the *process* and *results* of the G1000 produced wider endorsement among the Belgian population. This survey was sent out to 1000 randomly selected citizens from both sides of the linguistic divide, by a commercial polling firm bureau, which has a panel of over 110,000 individuals. Despite the fact that the pool is inevitably biased, the *ex post* controls showed that socio-demographic characteristics of our sample largely concurred with the socio-demographic distribution of the Belgian population.

Awareness of the G1000

In many European countries, participatory and deliberative events are usually very particular experiences, in the margin of the major political process and known only to a few people. Due to massive media coverage, the context of the Belgian political crisis and also the popularity of some of its organisers, however, the G1000 is known to more people than other similar initiatives. Table 4.1 shows that more than 52 per cent of respondents had heard of the G1000. We can also see that

Table 4.1: Awareness of the G1000

Have you heard of G1000?	Not at all		Quite a lot	A great deal
Total	47.7	39.8	10.1	2.4
Region (p=0.000)				
Flanders	38.0	45.9	12.6	3.5
Wallonia	65.0	30.9	31.4	0.6
Brussels	52.3	31.4	15.1	1.2
Gender (p=0.010)				
Male	42.2	43.1	11.7	3.0
Female	52.4	37.3	8.5	1.9
Education (p=0.005)				
Low	53.4	38.8	6.8	1.1
Middle	49.5	42.5	9.2	2.5
High	40.0	42.5	14.0	3.5
Age (p=0.909)				
>= 34	47.9	39.1	10.5	2.5
34–54	46.3	41.0	09.6	3.0
55+	48.8	39.5	10.1	1.6

there were big differences between the north and the south of the country, with many more people in Flanders having heard of it. The more extensive Flemish media coverage, linked to the presence of famous Flemish personalities in the organisational team, are the most credible factors accounting for this difference. The second interesting element shown in Table 4.1 is that there is a positive link between levels of education, although it seems smaller than one would expect. Unlike other cases of deliberation, the G1000 was not known only to the better educated, who are often already convinced of the merits of democratic innovations (Gourgues and Sainty 2011). This suggests that the organisers succeeded in putting their initiative on the societal agenda and opening the door to a wider public debate on democratic innovation.

Support for the process of the G1000

Before turning to the popular evaluation of the results of the G1000, we will examine to what extent the respondents were in favour of the process by which it was conducted. In other words, do respondents support the way in which citizens were consulted in the G1000? And do they think the G1000 has had any significant impact on the functioning of politics in Belgium?

The results in Table 4.2 show that respondents had mixed feelings regarding the procedures applied by the G1000. On the one hand, a large majority wants to see a repeat of the G1000. After all, about 60 per cent of respondents agree that citizens should be involved in political discussions on important policy issues in the future while about 40 per cent of respondents declare themselves willing to partake in such a mini-public in the future. This suggests that the G1000 process

Table 4.2: Support for the process of the G1000

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Completely agree
G1000 contributed to renewal of democracy in Belgium	7.2%	16.6%	60.1%	15.4%	0.7%
Recommendations formulated by citizens at G1000 should be turned into law.	3.3%	6.3%	59.7%	28.0%	2.7%
In future, citizens should be gathered again to discuss political issues, as at the G1000.	2.8%	4.9%	32.6%	44.0%	15.7%
I would agree to participate in a G1000 if I were randomly selected in the future.	11.4%	10.9%	36.2%	29.8%	11.7%

was received with enthusiasm and considered legitimate. On the other hand, however, only 16.1 per cent feel that the G1000 changed anything for democracy in Belgium. Most people (60.1 per cent) neither agree nor disagree that the G1000 set democratic innovation in motion. So while there is widespread support for the G1000, there is also doubt about the difference it made.

It is also noteworthy that citizens are undecided about whether the recommendations of the G1000 should be binding. This is interesting in light of recent discussions among deliberative democrats concerning the reach that the proposals of mini-publics should have (see, for example, Goodin and Dryzek 2006; Smith 2009; Ryan and Smith 2014). Some scholars advocate automatic implementation whereas others see a more modest role for these recommendations because they think mini-publics should have a merely advisory function. The respondents in our survey are also undecided concerning the impact that the G1000 should have on the political and legislative process, even though the advocates of direct implementation (32.7 per cent) still outnumber those who are opposed (9.6 per cent).

Support for the results of the G1000

Finally, we turn to the question of specific results. In any deliberative process, it is important that the recommendations formulated by the mini-public receive some form of public endorsement. As Dryzek puts it: ‘decisions still have to be justified to those who did not participate’ (2001: 654). This means that the results from a deliberative endeavour should be put to the test of publicity once more, and receive public assent. This could be done by putting the results to a popular vote in a referendum. Such a process of public endorsement was not part of the G1000, which is why we rely on the survey data to see whether there is substantive support for its ideas or not (Table 4.3).

Of the first two items, on labour-market-related questions, both proposals received overwhelming support among the survey respondents. No less than 72.3 per cent agreed with making the labour market more flexible and 61.3 per cent were in favour of lowering income taxes. The automatic indexing mechanism, which increases salaries based on a consumption index, also received the support of 60.6 per cent of the wider public.

The other three proposals (retirees on the labour market, non-discrimination and a universal basic income) received weaker public endorsement. This is most likely because there has never been a real public debate on these issues. People’s opinions thus have not yet crystallised. Another interesting perspective on these findings is that members of the wider maxi-public do not automatically endorse the decisions reached by the mini-public. This is the argument for deliberative polls: opinions announced after deliberation are different from common opinion because people have had the time and space to deliberate, exchange argument, hear different points of view and to develop a more ‘enlightened’ opinion (Fishkin 1992, 2009).

Table 4.3: Support for results of G1000

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Completely agree
Labour market has to become more flexible so employees can move more easily between companies and organisations.	2.4%	5.6%	19.7%	47.3%	25.0%
Income taxes should be reduced and alternative sources of public finances must be found.	4.9%	9.6%	24.2%	40.5%	20.8%
Automatic indexing mechanism for salaries must be maintained.	5.1%	11.8%	22.5%	34.5%	26.1%
To prevent future generations from having to bear weight of ageing population, labour market should be opened more to retirees.	10.9%	16.7%	25.6%	34.4%	12.4%
Non-discrimination should be main principle for getting subsidies.	5.1%	12.2%	37.0%	32.6%	13.1%
A universal basic income should be implemented.	18.2%	25.6%	28.6%	21.4%	6.2%

The conventional political uptake

The effect of the G1000 on the policy process was non-existent in the short term but that does not mean that there were no influences from the G1000 on the major political actors of the country. This section analyses the reactions of political elites towards the G1000 and its idea of a different kind of democracy. First, we look at the manifestos of the political parties that are the main players in the Belgian political landscape (Deschouwer 2012). Second, we observe the discourses of members of Belgium's several parliaments and how they refer to the G1000.

Party manifestos

The notion of citizen political participation beyond the ballot box, including deliberation as well as sortition (drawing lots), became an important element in

the discourse of some Belgian parties in the electoral campaign of 2014. We have analysed every manifesto of the thirteen parties²² that won at least one seat in one of the parliaments directly elected in that year (European Parliament; House of Representatives; Flemish Parliament; Walloon Parliament; Parliament of the Brussels-Capital Region; Parliament of the German-speaking Community). All the manifestos published by the parties for the three elections (European, federal, and regional/community) were part of this comparison. Some parties, like the Francophone ecologists (Ecolo) and Flemish regionalists (N-VA), produced one manifesto for the three elections; whereas parties like the Francophone regionalists (FDF) had four different ones (federal, Walloon, Brussels and European). Moreover, we performed a thematic analysis on questions related to democratic innovations, participation and deliberation.

The analysis yielded a fourfold typology. The first group is composed of the Flemish regionalists (N-VA) and the Francophone Union (UF). The topics of participation or deliberation are not present in their manifestos. For the second group, these questions are present in the manifesto only by the institution of referendum. This is the case for the (radical) right-wing parties like the Francophone Populist Party (PP) and Flemish radical-right party (VB). Thirdly, the majority of party manifestos include general sentences asking for more participation, mainly at local levels, but without concrete propositions for institutions or the formalisation of this participation by citizens. This is the case for Francophone liberals (MR), radical left (PTB GO!), regionalists (FDF) as well as Flemish socialists (sp.a) and Christian-Democrats (CD&V). For instance, FDF explains in its Proposition 354 in the federal manifesto that ‘It should also adopt a code of citizen participation at the provincial level according to the principle of participatory democracy’ (FDF 2014: 148) but the manifesto gives neither an explanation about the content of this code nor does it state if this principle is also necessary at other levels of governance.

Parties that seem more in favour of citizen-participation form the last group; some of these parties had propositions comparable to the ones defended by the G1000. This is the case for the two Green parties (Ecolo and Groen); the Francophone socialists (PS); the Francophone Christian-Democrats (cdH); and the Flemish liberals (Open Vld). This last group of parties all suggest delving into hot political issues by organising citizen-panels or citizen-juries, which would be in charge of formulating propositions. The Open Vld proposes the use of a form of participatory budgeting (page 48 of its manifesto). The three Francophone parties of this fourth group also recommend the use of sortition to select participants for such experiments.

22. CD&V (Flemish Christian Democrats); cdH (Francophone Christian Democrats); Ecolo (Francophone Ecologists); Groen (Flemish Ecologists); FDF (Francophone Regionalists); MR (Francophone Liberals); N-VA (Flemish Regionalists); Open Vld (Flemish Liberals); PP (Francophone Populists); PS (Francophone Socialists); PTB-GO! (Francophone Radical Left); sp.a (Flemish Socialists); VB (Flemish Radical Right); UF (Union of the Francophone in Flanders).

So what is the impact of the G1000 on these manifestos? In the previous elections, of 2010, there was no reference to citizen-panels or random selection in politics for the PS and Open Vld and the chapters on democratic innovation concentrated on the reinforcement of existing institutions (parliaments; petitions; use of public consultation). The G1000 is certainly not the only source of democratic innovation but it influenced the discourse of these parties on this topic. In a chronicle published in 2014, the President of the Francophone Socialists argued that the G1000 and the ideas defended by its organisers ought to inspire public authorities to organise randomly selected bodies of citizens to transform representative democracy.²³ For the other parties of the group, institutionalised participation by citizens had already been proposed in 2010 but we can see some links with the G1000 in the two Green parties' manifestos. In the Flemish Green Party manifesto, one sentence was, in fact, inspired by one of G1000's slogan: 'Democracy is more than colouring in a box every four, five or six years.' The manifesto of the Francophone Greens was the most influenced by the G1000. They take this experiment as an exemplar of good future practice:

Specifically, Ecolo calls for the development of citizens' conferences or deliberative panels such as panels of citizen-users to evaluate some policy; roundtables with experts and citizens or the G1000. In other words, investigation of an issue by a group of people randomly selected, through an improved public debate (particularly with regard to environmental issues, societal debates or other long-term issues) (Ecolo 2014: 000) [authors' translation].

This extract reveals the indirect impact of the G1000. The initiative acts as a point of reference, an argument, and an exemplar of best practice for parties that want to promote or organise participation in public deliberation among ordinary citizens. The G1000 is certainly not the only source of inspiration for them but it acts as an important element of the issue-framing for people both outside and inside the political arena. For instance, the President of the Study Centre of the Francophone liberal MR organised a conference on 15 March 2014 with the title *Reinventing Democracy*. The MR invited one spokesperson from the G1000 to speak about the experience. One day before the conference, Jean Gol gave an interview to the newspaper *Le Soir* to explain why the Belgian regime needed democratic innovation. Furthermore, he argued that deliberation among randomly selected citizens was a good means for achieving such renewal.²⁴ In an open letter, the President of the Francophone Brussels Parliament, Hamza Fassi Firi (cdH), argued for the importance of making democracies more deliberative as they faced the major issues of the twenty-first century. He then organised a conference with another spokesperson of the G1000 (Fassi-Fihri 2014). In sum, several political leaders have used the G1000 as an exemplar of desirable democratic transformation.

23. Available online at: <http://www.ps.be/Pagetype1/Actus/News/Chronique-de-Paul-Magnette-Contre-les-elections.aspx> (accessed 9 February 2016).

24. 'La démocratie, avec tirage au sort', Richard Miller, *Le Soir*, 14 March 2014.

G1000 in the parliament

As mentioned earlier, the formal political uptake of the G1000 was limited. In the different parliaments of Belgium, the heart of representative democracy, a few MPs did speak about the G1000. For example, in the session on 9 May 2012 three MPs from the two Green parties in the House of Representatives presented a proposition for a resolution concerning the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union. Opposed to the ratification of this agreement, they proposed to organise a large debate with social partners before proceeding to a vote. This large debate would use ‘innovative ways to encourage reflection based on the G1000’.²⁵ Here, the G1000 was used by opposition MPs in support of their criticism of the process of the negotiation of the treaty and to insist on the idea that other forms of political process are possible.

In the Flemish Parliament, the Socialist MP Steve D’Hulster (sp.a) asked the Flemish Minister-President a question about the initiative.²⁶ He said that the content of the report should be analysed by the Flemish government and that the process could inspire other governmental initiatives. The Minister-President responded, in a very formal style, that he had not yet read the report. Nevertheless, he noted that this kind of initiative is very fruitful and that the participation of citizens is a very important component in the process.

The social uptake

Since its very conception, the dissemination of the idea of a more participatory and deliberative democracy was the aim of the G1000. That is the reason why, at the margin of the G1000 summit, two events were organised to broaden the scale of the project. With the G’Home, every citizen had the opportunity to participate in a simultaneous online deliberation. This gave the opportunity to 730 citizens, not randomly selected, to participate in the discussion and to exchange points of view. Also, local mini-publics, the G’Offs, were organised by volunteers across the country. In total, 356 participants met each other in fifty locations to discuss the same topics as in Brussels.

These two elements opened the G1000 to the outside world and gained the support of people who wanted to find new modes of political participation. Some people were interested by the idea and the method and became defenders of deliberative democracy. An example is very illustrative. A group of citizens organised a G’Off in Grez-Doiceau but they found the experience too short to have any real effectiveness. A few months later, joined by other inhabitants of the village, they decided to create their own democratic innovation in Grez-Doiceau. Their G100 took place three years later in 2014, gathering volunteers and randomly

25. Doc 53 2180/001, Chambre des représentants de Belgique, 9 mai 2012, ‘Proposition de résolution relative au Traité sur la stabilité, la coordination et la gouvernance au sein de l’Union économique et monétaire’, déposée par MM. Georges Gilkinet et Stefaan Van Hecke et Mme Muriel Gerken, p. 12.

26. Vlaams Parlement, Handeling, Plenaire vergadering nr. 9 (2012–2013), 14 November 2012.

selected people during one weekend to discuss and engage proposals for the future of the municipality.

It is always difficult to measure the influence of one specific event on the spirit of a time but several initiatives can be considered to be clearly the result of the G1000. The most evident example is the G1000 that was organised on 22 March 2014 in Amersfoort, a city just south of Amsterdam, three days after the municipal elections. The logo and the general atmosphere were similar to the ones in Brussels. The project was also organised by independent citizens but the major difference was that traditional political actors were more integrated with the process. Every discussion table was composed of randomly selected citizens alongside public officials and elected representatives, as in the case of Ireland.

Several initiatives were also born in Belgium in the wake of the G1000, mainly at the local level, such as the G100 organised by the community centre in Ath, K35 in Kortrijk or the local CD&V of Kuurne, who organised a G100. These experiences make the trajectory of the G1000 interesting to consider. Indeed, these grassroots events inspire more traditional political actors like political parties, and public and semi-public bodies. G1000 projects exist also in Uden and Rotterdam in the Netherlands, in France and in Hungary.

All these elements can help us rethink the relation between deliberative small-scale democratic venues and democracy in the whole system (Chambers 2009). Goodin and Dryzek (2006) explain that mini-public deliberation can be used to inform the public debate; to test propositions for reform; and to legitimate policy. With the example of the G1000, we can add a new sort of output: the existence of a mini-public used by other political actors, traditional and non-traditional, as a reference to promote a more deliberative democracy. For them, while the content of the final proposition of the G1000 is irrelevant, the process remains crucial.

Conclusion

The G1000 was certainly an outlier in the Belgian political context. In a country in which not just political parties but also civil-society organisations are the backbone of the political system, such a citizen-led initiative was received with both great caution and great expectations. The G1000 received praise for its input and its throughput legitimacy because of its overall organisation and bottom-up approach. Moreover, this bottom-up approach was seen as especially successful as it was reinforced by a will to maintain wide inclusiveness that relied on random selection. However, on the output side, the G1000 failed to have an impact on short-term policy-making, despite the concrete proposals made by the G32 citizens after three weekends of deliberation.

Nevertheless, in the longer run, the political and social uptakes of the G1000 are increasing: most political parties now advocate some form of participatory and deliberative democracy. What is more, the G1000 sparked a debate in Belgium and in neighbouring countries about new ways of designing democracy. Therefore the weak output legitimacy assessment that was given immediately after the G1000

now needs to be nuanced. And this finding is interesting in light of the debate raised by this book.

To be sure, the G1000 cannot be described as a *constitutional* mini-public. It was not designed by any political bodies, let alone by any constitution-making ones. Above all, the aim of the G1000 was not reforming the Belgian constitution, even partially. Yet the G1000's macro-level political uptake, broadly understood, has been increasing steadily in the years since it happened. In fact, this citizen-led initiative sparked a more general debate about the nature of democracy in Belgium and, especially, about the role of citizens. The public authorities are not necessarily going to call for a constitutional convention inspired by the G1000 but this initiative has paved the way for this possibility in a country in which, because of the divide between the two main language-communities and the consociational legacy (Swenden 2013; Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2014a), citizens are often kept away from political negotiations about the future of the country.

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