

Evaluation of the Biergerkommittee
Lëtzebuerg 2050

Executive Summary

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Plateforme Luxembourgeoise
de la Démocratie Participative



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Overview

This executive summary is part of the report titled ‘Evaluation of the Biergerkomitee Lëtzebuerg 2050’. The report presents critical findings from independent research into the first national Citizens Council in Luxembourg. It provides an in-depth evaluation of the Biergerkomitee Lëtzebuerg 2050 (BK) that was commissioned by the Department of Land-use Planning of the Ministry of Energy and Land-use Planning, and more precisely by Minister Claude Turmes, as part of the overarching expert consultation ‘Luxembourg in Transition’. The BK was comprised of 30 randomly selected individuals living or working in Luxembourg. Throughout 2021, these members were guided through a process of learning, deliberation, and decision-making by a secretariat, a team of facilitators, and external experts. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the BK was partially held online.

The report assesses the Biergerkomitee process, including organization, participant selection, evidence, deliberation, facilitation, and decision-making. It furthermore covers the members’ experience and the impact of the Biergerkomitee on policy, maxi-public, and debate. The evaluation is based on member surveys; in-depth semi-structured interviews with members, the organization, and moderators; non-participant observation; document analysis; and media coverage review. Our report reveals that the BK was a respected process that served as a vital platform for democratic deliberation, fostering diverse perspectives, informed discussions, and consensus-building.

In this constantly evolving landscape of participatory democracy, the Biergerkomitee served as a valuable model for deliberative decision-making, demonstrating both the possibilities and the areas that require improvement. As citizens’ participation moves forward, continued efforts to enhance inclusivity, reduce resource intensity, and expedite policy impact will be key in further solidifying its success as a democratic instrument.

This executive summary provides a summary of our report’s critical findings and ten recommendations for future deliberative consultations – in Luxembourg.

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Key Findings

Commissioning and purpose

The mandate for the citizens' consultation was given by the Department of Land-use Planning of the Ministry of Energy and Land-use Planning, more precisely Minister Claude Turmes. In January 2021, the Biergerkomitee 2050 was officially launched. The main aim of the BK was to supplement the 'Luxembourg in Transition' expert consultation process, ensuring that citizens had a chance to actively participate in developing recommendations on how the territory should be organized to make Luxembourg climate-neutral by 2050. The combination of an expert consultation (LIT) and citizens' consultation (BK) aimed to ensure that technical expertise was complemented by the perspectives, values, and lived experiences of citizens.

Task

The Biergerkomitee worked on a particular task that framed their learning, deliberation, and recommendations. More precisely, the members were asked to provide an answer to the question: **What should Luxembourg do to be climate-neutral by 2050?** In addition to this question, the members were tasked with three missions:

- 1. The BK must make themselves available to the various teams of experts of Luxembourg in Transition for exchanges during their scenario development phase.
- 2. The BK must develop an understanding of how Luxembourg should position itself by 2050 to achieve climate neutrality.
- 3. The BK must make recommendations to politicians on how the territory should be organized so that Luxembourg becomes climate-neutral.

Based on our findings, we conclude that the task and missions assigned to the BK did not create any issues for its members. However, when questioned about the missions, the members mentioned only the second and third missions, as the first mission was disregarded by everyone involved. In other words, only two out of the three assigned missions were successfully completed.

Process and duration

Originally planned to take place in person, most events were moved to digital platforms (particularly Zoom) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The BK was divided into two phases: the informative phase and the deliberation phase. During the first phase, which took place from January to June 2021, the members met twice a month with experts. These meetings were held online via Zoom. In mid-July, the members conducted an interim evaluation of the process and discussed the next steps. The second phase of the BK (mainly in-person) took place from September to December 2021 and was divided into two separate phases. From mid-September to early October, members met to deliberate, while from October to December, they focused on writing and refining the recommendations. The members agreed that they had sufficient time to conduct thorough argumentation, exchange information, and develop recommendations.

Governance and delivery body

The responsibility of governance was given to a delivery body to ensure that the Biergerkomitee remained independent of the commissioning body and other vested interests. Stoldt Associés oversaw the BK's preparation and organization, including the facilitation. Stoldt Associés is an independent consulting firm with a background in participatory processes and citizen dialogue. The structure of the process set up by the Ministry gave the delivery body significant control over design and facilitation, but no control over participant recruitment. Different from other citizens' consultations, the BK secretariat and main moderator were the same person. Although this double role may compromise the independence of the process and neutrality of the moderation, most members did not express any concerns about this particularity. Instead, this composition facilitated streamlining the planning and execution while also ensuring consistency throughout the process.

A monitoring group was established to accompany the initiative, comprising experts, researchers, and consultants in the fields of participatory politics, deliberative democracy, and climate change. Overall, the BK's governance worked well and did not raise any issues.

Participant recruitment

The Biergerkomitee was comprised of 30 members who were selected at random to reflect Luxembourg's diverse society. The selection criteria included 1) a passive understanding of Luxembourgish, French, and German, 2) three years of living or working in Luxembourg, and 3) no personal connection to civil society or political organizations. Members were compensated with 40 euros per attended in-person session and 25 euros for online meetings. Seven people resigned from the process, three of whom left due to dissatisfaction with the process. No substitutes were used to replace the resigning members, which we consider to be a significant shortcoming.

Our investigation reveals that the Biergerkomitee was not demographically representative of the Luxembourg population. The committee was slightly dominated by middle-aged and higher educated individuals. Additionally, we found that members had a higher-than-average level of political interest and commitment and were more interested in and concerned about climate change. One of BK's main shortcomings was not ensuring the inclusion of climate skeptics in the process.

Structure

The delivery body chose not to break the process into workstreams due to the BK's small size. This resulted in the participants working almost constantly as a single group. While this approach is unique compared to most other citizens' consultations, it worked well for the BK and there were no significant shortcomings in the process or its outcome.

One of the unique features of the Biergerkomitee was its online and multilingual context. The multilingual setting did not pose any problems, likely because the participants had to have a passive knowledge of three languages (Luxembourgish, French, and German). However, members were not completely satisfied with the online environment, which included Zoom and Slack. They felt that it was not as engaging as in-person sessions and

did not allow for a fluid exchange of ideas. Nonetheless, the members claimed that the overall process was not affected.

Facilitation

Two forms of facilitation are commonly used in climate assemblies: directive table facilitation and self-organization by citizens. In the case of the Biergerkomitee, directive table facilitation was used for both online and in-person sessions. Throughout the process, the moderator(s) guided the members to ensure that they used their time effectively, stayed on task, and acted fairly. We did not identify any issues with the facilitation. On the contrary, the members found the facilitation to be helpful and perceived the quality of facilitation to be good. The participants claimed that the moderator(s) took a supportive approach and encouraged members to be respectful.

Evidence base

To ensure that the members of the climate assembly had access to balanced information on all the topics discussed, Stoldt Associés made sure that they received information from a range of experts. Throughout the process, more than 25 experts from various institutions and disciplines were invited to speak, covering a wide range of expertise needed to provide accurate and relevant evidence in the field of climate change and climate neutrality. However, we find that there was a lack of gender diversity among the experts.

Overall, the members were satisfied with the quality of the experts, but the experts' use of jargon hindered the members' comprehension at times. This may have contributed to some participants feeling overwhelmed with the amount of information presented.

Developing recommendations and decision-making

The members of the Biergerkomitee were responsible for generating their recommendations. While the secretariat provided the decision-making structure as well as the initial writing and clustering of the proposals and recommendations, the members were always closely involved and ensured that the recommendations were their own. The Biergerkomitee embraced a collaborative approach, allowing members complete autonomy in fine-tuning the recommendations and determining which ones to include. The members took pride in the collective decision-making process, and their sense of ownership over the final proposals and report was evident. After intense deliberations, the Biergerkomitee members reached a consensus on 44 recommendations.

Commitment to respond

The Biergerkomitee was given the responsibility to provide recommendations to Luxembourg's political scene. The members were informed that their suggestions would be taken into consideration to create the Master Program for Territorial Management (PDAT). Minister Turmes reaffirmed this promise on multiple occasions. However, there was no legal obligation to implement the BK's proposals, nor was there a formal commitment to respond to the Biergerkomitee's outputs.

Measuring members' trust in the political follow-up of the recommendations and comparing their opinions in the pre- and post-survey, we notice a significant change. Specifically, we find that members reported a lower level of trust in the political follow-up. This could be due to their expectation of prompt action on the suggestions they had developed, or at least a more transparent communication.

Communication and public engagement

Our findings indicate that the Biergerkomitee process was transparent in several ways. Firstly, all virtual meetings with experts were open to the wider public. The expert sessions were advertised on social media, and those interested were invited to register by sending an email to the organizing committee. Once registered, they received a link to the event. Additionally, the expert sessions were recorded. The recordings were made available online, along with a concise summary. Secondly, the Biergerkomitee aimed to explain their decisions to the general public by publishing their final report in French, German, and English. Thirdly, a media strategy was employed in which participants were interviewed on the radio throughout the process to provide insider information on their participation without giving away too many details. Our findings indicate that the Biergerkomitee received significant media coverage, which helped to increase its visibility and shape public perception of its activities.

Budget

The Biergerkomitee was funded by the Ministry of Energy and Land-use Planning, with the budget not publicly disclosed.

Recommendations

Remit and framing

1. Ensure that the missions are concrete and do not overwhelm the consultation's agenda.

Participant recruitment

2. Ensure substitute members from the start to maintain representativity and adaptability throughout the deliberative process.
3. Remove obstacles to participation to foster an inclusive and representative decision-making process, ultimately resulting in a more diverse range of voices.
4. Offer minimal information about the topic of the consultation to reduce self-selection bias and promote a more diverse participant pool.
5. Broaden the sampling process by incorporating attitudes towards climate change as a selection criterion, promoting a more comprehensive and well-balanced citizens' consultation.

Expert selection and provision

6. Promote diversity in expert selection by not only considering the experts' disciplinary and field diversity but also their socio-demographic backgrounds.
7. Enhance the effectiveness of citizens' consultations by allocating sufficient time for members to process information comprehensively. Similarly, ensure that members can thoroughly engage with the content, fostering a more informed and productive deliberative process.

Process

8. Enhance member engagement and participation in citizens' consultations conducted in an online setting.
9. Incorporate multilingualism as a fundamental principle in citizens' consultations in Luxembourg. Provide resources for translation and interpretation services to ensure all participants can engage effectively in their preferred language. Encourage the use of Luxembourg's official languages, and consider adding English as an additional accessible language to foster inclusivity and mirror the nation's linguistic diversity.

Links to policy

10. Establish a clear and transparent commitment to the political follow-up of recommendations, including regular updates on the status of implementation. Ensure that the process is responsive and that recommendations are taken seriously.