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– a policy analysis of an activist movement in the South-East of France

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Abstract

This paper is based at the nodal points of several phenomena, including political distrust in France, a European trend supporting public participation, a failed experiment of citizen assembly in France, and the organisation of a citizen collective to advocate for a replication of a similar citizen assembly, at the regional level, by environmental activists. In this context, I have conducted a policy analysis focusing particularly on the activist movement with the aim to provide insights into new expectations for democratic governance of environmental resources.

This research introduces a new approach to the study of the dynamics of democracy. By applying a power- and subjectivity-sensitive policy analysis framework to an activist movement, I argue that much can be learned about the grounds and sense-making of this movement, which holds a great potential in facilitating dialogue between the civil society and political governance institutions, and democratising governance.

The analysis revealed that the current model of French governmental policymaking is criticised on the grounds of its unwillingness to include external knowledge, perspectives, and actors. The rationale for replicating a citizen assembly then, stood both in the process and in the outcome. The process of the CCC-AURA project enables for a subjectivity-sensitive form of governance to take place, based on principles of inclusion, the valuation of all knowledges, and the specific attention to lived experiences and subjectivities created, and in which citizens reclaim decision-making power. This holds implications in terms of the agency, and subjectivities created by the policy, but also for future governance: the CCC-AURA comes in as a project to re-align environmental governance practices to the democratic expectations held by citizens and creates a momentum that can be harnessed to challenge and redefine what democratic governance means in practice.

Keywords: governance, democracy, activism, Democratic Innovation, civil society, participation, deliberative democracy, political trust, democracy crisis

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Abbreviations

AURA	Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes
CCC	Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat
CCC-AURA	Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat en Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes
EU	European Union
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
USA	United States of America
WPR	What's the Problem Represented to be?
YV	Yellow Vests

1. Introduction

Citizen trust in political institutions is decreasing across Europe (Saurugger 2007; Melios 2020). In France, this was for instance reflected in the Yellow Vest crisis, a popular uprising stirred by an environmental policy placing the weight of environmental taxation unto citizens alone, sparing the corporate and industrial emitters (Boyer et al. 2020). Following months of protest and several governmental attempts to create channels of participation for citizens, French President Macron announced the creation of a Citizen Assembly on Climate (further abbreviated as national CCC, for national Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat), in which 150 citizens, randomly drawn, would debate and draft policies to respond to the climate crisis (Rafidinarivo 2020).

The mandate of the national CCC was to "define a series of measures to reach a reduction of at least 40% of GHG emissions by 2030 (and compared to 1990) in a spirit of social justice" (CCC 2021). The President committed to submit "without filter" these measures to either a national referendum or a Parliamentary vote, or to directly write them into the national legislation (Elysée 2019). 149 proposals were issued by the Assembly; however, they did not follow the intended track of being submitted "without filter" to other governmental bodies and instead were amended or disqualified by the government (Les 150 2021). Despite the CCC presenting potential for "real delegated power" (Galende-Sánchez & Sorman 2021:9), in effect, the results of this assembly were heavily contested, by some on the account of citizens not being expert enough to be able to produce relevant measures (Kervasdoué 2020), and by others for not following the initial mandate and instead vetoing and amending the measures proposed by citizens, and reducing the reach and depth of these measures (Médiapart 2020).

Despite these acknowledged failures, this model of Citizen Assembly seems to have gathered the support of some groups of the population, with activist movements and local authorities looking at replicating it at different scales (Région Occitanie 2020, Pour une CCC en AURA 2021, Pétition Assemblée Nationale 2020). In the French administrative region of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (AURA), a collective of citizens and associations is actively advocating for such a Citizen Assembly on Climate to be implemented at the region's scale. The initiative reflects a citizen-led demand

for democratic innovation in environmental governance, and a questioning of current models of democracy and governance in light of the environmental crisis humanity faces.

In this paper, the government-initiated Citizen Assembly on Climate will be referred to as the national CCC, while the Citizen Assembly on Climate in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes project initiated by members of the civil society will be referred to as the CCC-AURA, and the initiators as the Collective.

Despite a surge of literature examining models of public participation and deliberative democracy, research on citizen assemblies, including but not limited to assemblies on environmental themes, is focused on the examination of government-initiated citizen assemblies. For instance, local and national citizen assemblies in countries such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, the USA, Switzerland, Germany, and Canada have been the subject of research to understand levels of participation and topics examined by the assemblies (Galende-Sánchez & Sorman 2021), deliberation practices (Warren & Pearse 2008), deliberation success factors (Gerber & Mueller 2018), opinion making (Stadelmann-Steffen & Dermont 2016; Suiter et al. 2016), all bearing on 'state-sponsored' assemblies. These studies looked at practical characteristics within government-initiated citizen assemblies, in a bid to critically assess their potential and relevance in improving democratic practices. This research brings another perspective to the study of citizen assemblies, by looking at a project for a citizen assembly, initiated and supported not by the government, but by a group of citizens.

This research aims at understanding the rationale for the launch of the Collective for a Citizen Assembly in AURA, as well as its effects, and to understand the gap between the CCC policy and the expectations for the CCC-AURA. This empirical focus is interesting in many aspects. Firstly, France has a long tradition of an elitist government that does not engage with the population for decision-making (Saurugger 2007). Therefore, not only consulting citizens, but delegating decision-making power comes as an innovative governance project, but also a project characterised by uncertainties both in process and outcome. Secondly, there is an interesting contradiction to examine in the fact that a group of citizens criticised the results of the government-led citizen assembly, to then advocate for a citizen assembly to be implemented in their region.

The analysis draws on Bacchi's approach to policy analysis, suggesting that the Collective's actions are a response to a certain perceived problem. Indeed, according to Bacchi (2009), actors, including governments, act upon a phenomenon that they take a proactive role in identifying as a 'problem'. The national CCC was

a response to such a phenomenon. As an activist movement, the Collective and its project are also a response to a certain perceived problem.

This research introduces a new approach to the study of the dynamics of democracy. By applying a power- and subjectivity-sensitive policy analysis framework to an activist movement, I argue that much can be learned about the grounds and sense-making of this movement, which holds a great potential in facilitating dialogue between the civil society and political governance institutions, and democratising governance.

Bouncing off the case of the national CCC, and using Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to be' framework, the following questions will be answered:

>RQ1: What does the Collective perceive as problematic in current models of environmental governance?

>RQ2: Which similarities and differences can be observed between the governance model proposed by the Collective, and other French contemporary models of governance?

>RQ3: What can the gap between the Collective's proposals and current models of governance reveal about the Collective's expectations for a model of democratic environmental governance?

The thesis is structured as follows. I begin by laying out the empirical background for this case, describing the French democratic context in which both the national and CCC-AURA projects were developed, which responds to the third question of Bacchi's analytical framework 'How has this Problem Representation come about?'. In this section, I also describe the vision and aims of the Collective, i.e., the policy project analysed in this paper. Next, I report the theoretical background of this research, including the ontological and epistemological premises of the study, and the theory and framework used for the analysis. In the third chapter, I describe my method and my position as a researcher in relation to the CCC-AURA case. In the empirical sections, based on interviews with actors engaged in the Collective and various existing materials relating to the Collective, I investigate the problem representations, underlying assumptions, and effects of the CCC-AURA. These are then compared to those of the government initiated CCC. In the discussion chapter, I return to my research questions and deepen the analysis by considering the dissemination and reproduction environment of the policy and problem representation and reflect on how they are challenged and defended. Finally, I draw on the implications of the main findings for academia, policymakers, and activists.

2. Background

In this section, I review concepts on which the material analysed in my research draws and introduce key characteristics of the current French governance model to contextualise the emergence of the Collective as both a critique and a counterproposal of democratic governance.

2.1. A conceptual review of democracy and legitimacy

Etymologically, the word democracy comes from the Greek 'dēmos' which means 'people', and 'kratos', which means 'rule'. In its overarching meaning, it therefore refers to a system in which the people have governing power. Democracy is a term central to political studies, and yet has many different definitions or cases that oppose each other. That is because democracy, and democratic characteristics, are pluralistic (Häikiö 2007; Dovi 2018) - many standards and definitions co-exist. As such, democracy is a floating signifier: it is a term that can hold different meanings depending on how and by whom it is used - and which can therefore be adapted to different discourses (Laclau & Mouffe 2001). Democracy in a political system can take several forms, although it also takes place outside the institutionalised political arenas (Saward 2021). The four models of democracy briefly described in the following paragraphs are the ones relevant to this particular case, but many more exist.

First, *Representative democracy*, aggregative democracy, or liberal democracy, can itself take several forms. In France, most of the power is held by a president elected by the people - it is a form of presidential representative democracy. Representative democracy can also be federal, or parliamentarian. In all these cases, the government or part of the government is chosen through regular 'free and fair' elections (Saward 2021) and ideally, represents the interest of the people. The core principle of representative democracy is therefore the mechanism of aggregation, through which citizens choose which vision they want to support, and aggregate under the individual or party leading this vision (Chambers 2003).

Second, *Deliberative democracy* is centred around communication. Although it is seen as a critic of representative democracy, it is more of an extension of it than an opposed model since its outcome often also relies on voting (Chambers 2003). It relates to the Habermasian concept of communicative rationality, which draws on ideals of authentic, non-deceptive communication between all stakeholders affected by a decision, in an undistorted manner (Habermas 1981). Although an ideal, and not applicable, it reflects the aim for a "more fair, just, and pluralist way of doing democracy" (than aggregative democracy) (URBINATI 2000; Chambers 2003). Deliberative democracy is set in an ideal for respect in opposing opinions and pluralism (Carpini et al. 2004), in which opinions and interests are not fixed but can be revised when facing an informed argument or new information (Chambers 2003) and is more inclusive (Connelly et al. 2006).

Third, *Direct democracy* is yet another form of democracy, in which there is no representative to take the decision - decisions are instead taken by the people. As highlighted by Altman (2010), direct democracies have both merits and disadvantages, and their success potential lies in the process of decision-making. According to him, direct democracies are however very complicated to implement in practice. Referendums, through which citizens can vote to decide on an already drafted legislation, is an example of semi-direct democracy, as the citizens are not involved in the whole process of policymaking (Altman 2010).

Last, the *Participatory democracy* model is one that includes the people in decision-making processes, at different stages, through various mechanisms, and to various extents (Saward 2021). It is a common feature to democratic innovations in Western democracies. Although set upon similar values as deliberative democracy, participatory democracy does not have to include the specific practice of deliberation.

Legitimacy is another concept which meaning, and description is not a subject of concurring between authors, and is central to the understanding of democracy and critics of democratic practices. Its complexity resides in the fact that legitimacy takes different forms in different contexts and forms of democracy (Connelly et al. 2006).

For some, a regime is deemed legitimate when the governed accept the governing of the ruler (Schmitter 2001, Eschuis & Edwards 2013). For others, legitimacy is found in specific criteria. Pitkin (1965) sees legitimacy in social utilitarianism, i.e., when a regime works towards "the greater good for the greatest number" (Pitkin 1965:999), Beetham (2013) in the triangle between legality, justifiability, and consent, Scharpf (1999) following an input criteria of stakeholder influence and an output criteria of result acceptability; and Weber relies on experts to assess of the

justifiability of a regime or policy (Campbell 2009). And for others, it is context dependent and situated, a view for instance shared by Levelt & Metze (2014).

In the context of aggregative democracy, and especially among constructivists, the scholarly consensus is now that elections are not a sufficient authorisation mechanism (Saward 2021) in line with the shift towards increased public participation in policy making. Additionally, accountability is also increasingly added as a condition for legitimacy (Young 2000).

Legitimacy is a central concept in governance, for it justifies the viability of a certain regime or policy. Although it is a concept drawn upon by many actors in governance, there isn't a single way of proving one's legitimacy, and different actors call upon different legitimation processes.

2.2. The French governance model

Traditionally, the French approach to democracy is through elective representative democracy, a model which excludes the direct participation of citizens in decision-making (Saurugger 2007). In this approach to democracy, the role of citizens is limited to electing a government once every five years. Yet, France has always been the theatre of citizen-led protests, both reactively as a response to policies, and proactively to induce change. However, this does not imply that citizens and organisations are influential in policy-making processes. As Saurugger (2007) states, "it is generally said that the only link between groups and the state lies in France's tradition of conflict and head-to-head confrontation", with the state disqualifying organised groups based on three precepts: (i) the disqualification of groups collectively protesting the government, whether peacefully or violently, (ii) the disqualification of new groups of thoughts and interests on the assumption that existing groups that already have access to policy-making arenas already represent the interests of French citizens, and finally (iii) the disqualification based on 'non-representativeness' of the interests proposed compared to the French population (with the government in power of deciding whether a group meets this requirement, independently from the law). In this context, and aligned with this tradition, consultation is the only means of citizen participation endorsed by the French government (ibid), a tokenistic approach in Arnstein (1969)'s view. Traditionally, decision-making power is therefore concentrated by the government and the interest groups they already support.

However, France being a member of the EU, it is also part of a wider soft and hard power grid at the supranational level. Indeed, European standards and laws adopted at the EU level affect the French national legislation, including in the public

participation repertoire, and normative power also applies (Saurugger 2007). This takes its relevance here when looking at the EU trend of shift to a more participatory and inclusive form of democracy, itself propelled by public discourses from academia.

In terms of democracy and legitimacy, Macron's government is what Duhamel (2018) refers to as democratic presidentialism, where a president elected by the people accumulates most of the political power and can therefore implement its vision with minimal resistance. To Macron "elected representatives have a legitimacy that the election provides to them" (Elysée 2019), a view reiterated in many speeches, especially those responding to conflicts. This view of legitimacy is reductive compared to scholars' understandings of legitimacy and representative democracy, to whom arguably mechanisms of authorisation are part of legitimacy indeed but should be complemented by active accountability (Pitkin 1965; Young 2000), or more widely, as a concept that should not be applied to a body but rather to a situated decision-making process (Connelly et al. 2006). This understanding of legitimacy also ties into Macron's belief in meritocracy: "I am deeply attached to the meritocratic model, a republican elitism that works by attracting to the State (government) the best, to solve the most complex problems" (Elysée 2019) and into expertism: "We have a lot of solutions, I often said it, but they are too complex for our citizens" (ibid). This view provides a justification for concentrating the decision-making power up the hierarchy and is precisely what the Collective considers as a problem in the contemporary French context.

2.3. The national CCC

According to Bacchi (2009), problems are constructed in reference to wider perceived contexts. In our case, the dynamics of the normative understandings of democracy and participation, both in the EU and in France, are part of the articulation of discourses in which the national CCC, and later the CCC-AURA project, emerged.

The national CCC emerged in 2019 following the Yellow Vest conflict, and more specifically the Great National Debate[1] that stemmed from it and steered the government into adopting a public participation approach to the resolution of the conflict. The government met with proponent figures of environmental activist groups and agreed to proceed to launch a national Citizen Assembly on the Climate, during which 150 citizens, drawn by sortition, would draw climate legislation

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[1] The Great National Debate was the reaction of the government towards the Yellow Vest Crisis, in the shape of an attempt to gather the voices of citizens on the themes brought up by the protests.

proposals. These proposals would then be passed without filter to a national referendum, Parliamentary vote, or directly written into legislation (CCC 2021). As described in the introduction, the national CCC was heavily criticised, and the presidential commitment to delegate the policy-making power to the 150 citizens was withdrawn when the proposals were released, with the president applying a veto on some proposals before they could reach the next legislative phases.

I interpret the backing out of the government in view of the proposals as a clash between two different political visions, one being the elitist and exclusive French tradition, and the other one being the European participation vision on which the national CCC concept was drawn. Indeed, although the national CCC was sponsored and actively promoted by the government, with a promise of citizen power, this power was then rescinded by the government when it filtered the citizen proposals.

2.4. The CCC-AURA policy project

Following the national CCC, in September 2020, organisations and citizens from Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes organised themselves into a Collective to create a regional CCC. The primary goal advanced by the Collective is the establishment of "a randomly drawn citizen assembly that intervenes in the environmental policies of the Region" (CCC-AURA 2021d, press conference), to give a voice to citizens and accelerate climate change mitigation and adaptation at the regional scale.

The Collective gathers individuals and organisations. Among the latest, local and national branches of established international NGOs such as Greenpeace, Extinction Rebellion, Youth For Climate, and Zero Waste officially support the organisation with various resources (members, expertise, etc). As of May 2021, over 40 local, national, and international organisations are part of the Collective.

The movement is time-bound in two ways. Firstly, it emerged following the national CCC and its results, which created a momentum for both citizen demands for government-led climate action, and media coverage of the climate crisis and governance. Secondly, it is also time-bound in the future. In June 2021 will take place the regional elections in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, which situates the second objective of the Collective, as I present below.

There are two overarching objectives to the CCC-AURA movement. The first one is to collaboratively produce a scoping document, i.e., a document defining the mandate and characteristics of the citizen assembly. The second one is to obtain from the candidates to the regional elections to situate themselves vis-à-vis the

scoping document, to have candidates commit to the implementation of the CCC-AURA if and when they take office (CCC-AURA).

3. Theoretical background

3.1. Philosophical premises regarding the role of knowledge in the social construction of the world

This research is based on a constructivist and relativist worldview. I therefore understand reality as a constructed and situated concept. This explains my choice for a temporally- and geographically situated case-study to produce an interpretation of the reality perceived by the group I study.

In the context of climate change, the social constructionism view that reality is constructed can come in as confusing. Some events happen independently from society's members' discussions about it and occur whether or not they believe in it. It is however the way a change or other phenomenon is perceived, understood, and communicated that will frame the reaction of humans towards this change (Bacchi 2009). In that way, discourse analysis is vital to environmental governance, to the extent that the discourses that surround a phenomenon frame the management of this phenomenon. This also explains the centrality of knowledge in relation to power in discourses, as I will describe in the next section.

3.2. What's the Problem Represented to be (WPR)

3.2.1. Underpinnings

Bacchi draws heavily on Foucault's understanding of power and knowledge in her policy analysis works. For Foucault (1980), power is something found in relationships, and is dynamic: power can be detained, obtained, or surrendered, and is constantly at risk of being questioned, strengthened, or reduced. Interestingly, and with implications for governance studies, Foucault understands power as primarily coming from 'below': a domination starts when an agent surrenders their power to another agent.

A specificity of this understanding of power is that it does not see power as a reductive force, but rather as a productive one: with power comes resistance, resistance being the "irreducible opposite" of power (Foucault 1976:95).

For Foucault (1980), power comes into play through discourses and knowledge, by shaping what will be considered 'the truth'. Discursive power provides the lens that shapes the way reality is perceived by other actors. He therefore considers knowledge as more than merely situated, it is shaped and can be used for a specific agenda.

Following this view, Bacchi's work on policy analysis tackles discourses not as a specific use of language, but rather as the sometimes taken-for-granted knowledges and assumptions that affect the way one perceives the surroundings and reality. I use knowledge in plural form to denote the plurality of existing knowledges, each situated in their field. These knowledges are restrictive and establish "terms of reference (…) for thinking about people and social relations" (Bacchi 2009:35).

These terms of references influence perceptions of reality, and therefore influence the way people respond to this perceived reality, including through policies. Discourses are not neutral, and although they may exist simultaneously, discourses compete to establish a specific lens as the 'normal', unquestioned truth.

Bacchi's policy analysis framework comes in this context, with the specificity of studying policies as a response from governance actors to a perceived problem. This view therefore gives actors an active role in the interpretation of a phenomenon. It also recognises that this interpretation is not neutral, but situated in cultural and historical contexts, and that the lens through which an actor interprets a phenomenon also impacts the way the actor reacts to it. Indeed, a certain problematisation, which Bacchi states doesn't have to be intentional, still it narrows down the array of 'logical', and therefore acceptable, responses. Thus, the representation of a phenomenon in a specific way will steer the policy response in a certain direction.

3.2.2. Analytical framework: WPR

This research applies Bacchi's analytical framework 'What's the Problem Represented to be? (WPR) (Bacchi 2009).

In practice, studying problematisation means analysing the meaning creation process through several aspects. Bacchi's proposed framework constitutes of six sets of questions:

1. What is the problem represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?

2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?

3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?

4. What is left unproblematic in this representation of the problem? Where are the silences? How could responses differ if the problem were thought about or represented differently?

5. What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

6. How/where are dominant problem representations produced, disseminated, and defended? How could they be contested/disrupted?

The practical application of the framework is described in the following section.

4. Methods

4.1.1. Process

Data was generated in two ways. I began by collecting and analysing published and publicly available materials issued by the Collective. Among these are written documents such as the policy manifesto, social media posts, a press release, a press conference, and an open letter to candidates to the regional elections, as well as recordings of three interviews given by three spokespeople of the Collective to various media, namely a national newspaper, a regional television channel, and a Franco-Belgian radio channel. Additionally, I reached out to the Collective and to partner organisations, with five individuals responding positively to my interview requests. I had originally hoped to conduct field research in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, France, to conduct observations. Due to the Covid-19 crisis, this was not possible, and all my interviews were conducted online via Zoom. Difficulties linked to this setting, such as creating a comfortable atmosphere adequate for interviews, and internet quality, limited the scope of my research. I conducted five semi-structured online interviews with members of the collective, ranging between 45 and 90 minutes in length. All five interviewees were active members of the Collective engaged in various organisation and communication activities. The interviews were structured around questions relating their individual reasons for joining the collective, and to their hopes, expectations but also doubts about the mission of the collective. This led to the interviewees reflecting on themes of democracy, legitimacy, responsibility, power, and knowledge, although not always explicitly.

All oral materials were transcribed, and all materials were then coded using a colour-coding method on the transcripts. A first coding was applied, based on the six questions from Bacchi's framework, to identify and categorise the themes relevant to proceed to the analysis. These first filtered results were then gathered in a comparison table and sub-categorised to make sense of recurring patterns.

In a second phase, another layer of coding was conducted, to deepen my understanding of certain themes. For instance, this process included identifying pre-

assumptions regarding what constitutes legitimacy that I had not deemed most important at first but which further investigation, I realised, did enrich the analysis.

Both the field and desk data were originally in French. The materials were analysed in French to reduce the risks of misinterpretation linked to language, and only translated at the reporting stage.

4.1.2. Reflections on my bias as a researcher

In this research project, I am studying a Democratic Innovation. I am not aiming to produce an evaluation piece on the potential of citizen assembly. Rather, I am interested in understanding why this model seems to have rallied the support of, if not the French population as a whole, environmental and democratic activists. Yet, for transparency, it is worth noting that I am personally engaged in activism about the results of the national CCC. It is through these activist links that I first found out about the Collective and their project of a citizen assembly in AURA, where I grew up. As such, and although I am not directly engaged in the movement, it has come to my attention that two of my interviewees were in my network, one as a friend of a friend, another one as a friend of a family member. In line with this, it has also come to my attention that I share many socio-cultural traits with the members of the Collective, in the shape of my vote, the activist projects I support, the newspaper I read, my feminist and pluralist views, etc. This comes with two sides: I may be able to correctly understand statements and references that the material touches upon, yet it may affect my ability to take a step back to produce a critical reflection on my own assumptions and interpretations of the material.

5. Analysis

5.1. CCC-AURA: vision and policy

Although the assembly is at the core of the Collective's activities, it is also situated within a wider vision for the future of governance in the region. In this chapter, I describe the vision of the Collective, as well as the policy studied, to inform the analysis of the problem representation (5.2).

5.1.1. The Collective's vision for the future of governance.

Looking at long-term democratic practices and describing their hopes for the future, members of the Collective talked about political participation, power distribution, and representation throughout the interviews, which reflects an objective, in the long-term, of recentralising the active role of citizens in their democracy.

Firstly, talking about the role that civil society should have in a democracy, one of the members of the Collective mentioned that

> I really believe in participatory democracy, because we have a lot of people in France who don't want to take action because they don't feel concerned. And the fact of giving the power back to the people in a way, either through consultations, or via referendums, or via specific votes, or via a citizen assembly, these are ways to give back these people the will to participate in the political life- I'm not talking about political life as in political parties, but in a way participating in what is happening. (Interview B)

Also in this theme of power distribution, reflexions about the need for a greater counter-power were expressed, for instance with an interviewee mentioning:

> Counter-power is something that enables to make good decisions, beyond the fact that it slows things down a bit. But then again it's also what makes us go in the right direction. And that's what the CCC showed. It's been years, I don't know, 10 years, 20 years that we don't cover any ground on these topics, that no significant decisions are made. Well you take the time for 6 months to gather people and to have them discuss a topic, and in the end you have a collection of decisions ready to be used, you just have to write them into the law. (Interview A)

Additionally, representation was also touched upon in the material, for instance with Interviewee D stating that:

> Now, the National Assembly is not at all mirroring the French population. (…) I am not sure there are many idea confrontations in there. So yeah, lot drawing and sortition must match a certain number of criteria, but through it we are capable of having people who are a lot more the reflection of society. (Interview D)

This critic of the current representational democracy is used to back the idea that different ideas and ideologies, reflecting that stemming from the population, should be confronted for good governance to happen, with implications for the role and power of different actors. These themes are found throughout the materials.

Therefore, the vision for the future described in the material and in which the project of the CCC-AURA evolved involves a greater role, both in decision-making power and insight generation, of civil society. These ideas are very much aligned with the characteristics of participatory democracy described by Saward (2021), stating that citizens should be included in all the phases of decision-making.

5.1.2. The CCC-AURA policy

In the mid-term of the Collective's vision described above, and at the core of the movement is the demand for a citizen assembly, based on the understanding that there is a need

> to find a political method that enables us to make decisions in a democratic way and that enables us to manage the environmental crisis. So it renews the democratic practice to allow a system that is capable of facing the crisis we are going through. (Interview A)

The aim of the CCC-AURA policy is therefore to create this new 'political method', through a citizen assembly. There are two important facets for this in the policy. The first one is that the Collective aims to create "a process which guarantees the respect of citizens' voice", as explained in the open letter (2021e) the Collective addressed to candidates of the regional elections. The second one is to create and proceed to this citizen assembly "in a view of consultation, information, transparency, and participation", as stated by Interviewee B when reflecting on known existing citizen assemblies. These values, which will also be analysed in part 5.3, shape the methodology of the Collective.

To define the shape and details of the CCC-AURA, the Collective aims to gather contributions from the civil society and from these, produce a scoping document describing the frame and characteristics of the assembly (CCC-AURA 2021d, press conference).

5.2. Problem Representations

5.2.1. The Collective's problematisation of the current model of governance

In the case of the CCC-AURA, the empirical material, existing communications artifacts and the interviews, were explicitly stating the rationale and relevance for the existence and actions of the Collective. One could assume that the strong reliance on justification in communications is a common trait to all activist movements, and in our case, this presents an extensive basis on which to explore the problematisation.

The analysis of these justifications shed light on three themes: (i) the urgency of the environmental and social crises, (ii) the trust in political institutions, and democratic crises, and (iii) the lack of relevant governance mechanisms and policies in current governance models.

Asked in a radio interview about the rationale for the scale of the project, a member of the Collective answered by mentioning the relevance of the scale for the climate crisis:

> The Region's competencies are very interesting if we aim for a reduction of greenhouse gases. (...) It is a genuine added value to ask ourselves questions and to demand action rapidly given the climate urgency in which we are today; and the Region can help us to act in a way that's more efficient and more adapted to the territory. (RCF 2021)

Whether mentioned through international agreement targets, like was done by a member of the Collective over a press conference to introduce the initiative, through the mentions of the 'urgency' of 'crises' throughout the material, or through statements suggesting the need for environmental transformation, for instance reflected in the Manifesto (2020): "organising citizen assemblies is an efficient way to steer our country in a socially just ecological transformation", the climate crisis (term used interchangeably with 'environmental crisis') is a recurring problem representation.

Second, statements describing a trust and democratic crises were also mentioned throughout the material, with particular attention born to conflicts of interests, lack of citizen participation, and issues of representation within the current political system. For instance, in their open letter to the candidates of the regional elections, the Collective states that

> The experiment conducted at the national scale proved that a citizen assembly drawn by lot could create relevant and socially just proposals, while gathering the support of the population.

Yet, it is clear that the government refuses to keep its promise to adopt 'without filter' the proposals of the assembly that it itself sponsored. It then adds discredit to the political word, in which trust is increasingly rare. Ignoring the scientific consensus, it also deprives the population from measures that would protect it from the climate and environmental crisis, of an unprecedented amplitude. (CCC-AUR 2021e, open letter)

The quote illustrates the perceived conflicts of interests between the government and the citizens, with the scientific knowledge backing the Collective's argument against the government. More than the ministries and president, this lack of trust applies to the whole of the governmental institutions. Explaining to me why they joined the Collective, Interviewee B said:

In France especially, we can clearly see the extent to which the people totally lost its trust in the democratic tool and the executive. They absolutely don't believe anymore in Parliamentarians, politicians are vilified, they have to be corrupted, there really is a distrust. And anyway when you listen to people, when you see the Yellow Vest movement, when you talk with the Youth, there really is a distrust. (Interviewee B)

The third theme of the problem representation bears on the lack of relevant governance mechanisms and policies. This is for instance reflected by a member of the Collective, talking to reporters about the goal of the CCC-AURA project:

The goal is really to set up things that will allow to take very concrete measures that will have a real and fast impact, and to also launch the long-term policies. So yeah, the goal is really to have a tool that allows to make real decisions, that allow to propose real measures, so that some policies are implemented, so that there are things that change in the organisation of our region, our lifestyles, our ways of producing, consuming, moving, yeah and overall living. (CCC-AURA 2021d, press conference).

This statement illustrates that the Collective perceived a problem, here a lack of adequate mechanisms, that they address by proposing an alternative governance model (5.1).

Put together, these aspects of problem representations, namely (i) the urgency of the environmental and social crises, (ii) the trust and democratic crises, and (iii) the lack of relevant governance mechanisms and policies, interact with each other: the climate crisis creates a time pressure for strong changes to happen. These changes are perceived as needing to come from legislation. This legislation is created by the government, who is pointed out for not taking into account the climate and environmental crisis warnings of the scientific sphere, placing corruption interests before citizens', and more generally not acting fast enough, ambitiously enough, or in a legitimate way.

Therefore, the primary problem identified and acted upon by the Collective is the inadequacy of the current political system to cope with contemporary crises, be it

democratic, environmental, etc. In particular, the mentions of a need for a more pluralist and inclusive model of governance point towards underlying assumption of this problem representation being self-referentiality. Self-referentiality is defined by Luhmann (1995) as a system which relies exclusively on its own knowledge and capacities, and that is therefore closed to external contribution. For Blühdorn (2007), self-referentiality in contemporary governance systems is mirrored in the centrality of the universal economic rationale, which dictates the goals and the means of governance. In the CCC-AURA case, this is reflected by the comment of one interviewee asked about what democratic governance means to them:

> There are instances of participatory democracy, but it's… well it's to know which colour the benches should be painted. It's not… well let's say that the strategic core, the main of the decision remains still in the hands of elected reps. And representatives are taken up in political games, they are taken up in games of power games, and sometimes even if they reach power and manage to win elections, they are taken up in geopolitical constraints too, in a world where international competition is confined to economic war. (Interview A)

5.2.2. Contrasting the national and regional projects aiming for democratic innovation

Looking at the problem representation reproduced by the national CCC project, some themes overlap when justifying it. For instance, in the press conference during which the CCC was officially announced, President Macron touched upon the people's "lack of confidence in the elite" (Elysée 2019) - the elite mentioned here being the government- hence concurring with the Collective of the political distrust between governing and governed. Yet, the Collective's statements of political distrust as quoted above are directly linked to their problem representation, i.e. the inadequacy of the political system to cope with contemporary crises. This problem representation is not shared by the government, whose rationale for launching the national CCC was of course the resolution of the YV conflict, but also their understanding that environmental questions are "conflictual" in nature (Elysée 2019) and provoke these conflicts. Interesting to note is that when presenting the national CCC project, the lens given was that "the CCC, 150 citizens drawn by lot as soon as June, will have as primary mission to work on this subject, to redesign all concrete measures to support and help citizens around the ecological transition" (Elysée 2019). By identifying the "citizens" as actors who need help from the government, in the shape of legislation, the problem is framed in a way that shifts the responsibility for the ecological crisis onto citizens and excludes the government itself from critical examination. Yet, when the national CCC was formally launched, this frame had been altered and the assembly mandate was not presented as a project to help 'citizens', but rather to reduce the emissions at the national level.

Therefore, the governmental problematisation and the Collective's problematisation work in mirror and articulate the same themes and actors, yet in a different manner, the government identifying citizens as the actors responsible for the lack of environmental action, while the Collective identifies the government at the core of the problem. While the Collective, through their problem representation, point out the lack of adequate mechanisms and structures for 'good' governance, for the government, it comes down to creating a legislative framework to steer citizen behaviour, which is not opposed by these same citizens.

5.3. Presuppositions and Assumptions Underlying the Problem Representation

As an inherently political movement, the problem representation of Collective relies on particular assumptions about democracy, legitimacy, and political interests, but also on presuppositions of what success would look like, or what and whose knowledge should underpin governance. All these contribute to the construction of the Collective's problem representation, i.e. the inadequacy of the current political system to cope with contemporary democratic and environmental crises.

5.3.1. Legitimacy

A concept heavily mentioned in nearly all documents and interviews, and especially related to the problem representation aspect of the lack of political trust and the democratic crisis, is that of legitimacy. The Collective's focus on this concept makes sense in the context of a group of citizens producing a claim for change. The analysis of materials shows an understanding of legitimacy as being constructed by several characteristics, all explained in further depth further in this chapter.

The first of these characteristics is the 'democratic' aspect of environmental governance processes. Asked in a radio interview about the goal of the Collective, a member replied that

> The goal is to start the machine (of democratic experimentations) but in the most democratic and open way possible, to formulate a (scoping) document that will be legitimate when we will then go and propose it to the candidates of the regional elections. (RCF 2021)

Also relying on democratic values to legitimise a process, and talking about the national CCC, a member mentioned that

> "Emmanuel Macron decided to implement the CCC at the national scale, with the objective of finding solutions to reduce by 40% GHG emissions compared to 1990 and by 2030, in a spirit of social justice. So the CCC proposed 149 structuring measures to mitigate the climate crisis. These measures are legitimate because chosen by citizens, in a democratic manner. They were felt as fair and legitimate precisely because they emanated directly from the population, from you, from me, who gathered, who tried to retrieve information and made decisions accordingly" (CCC-AURA 2021d, press conference).

The fact that democracy seems to be a required basis for legitimacy to happen does of course bring the question of what democracy means, which will be developed in the next section.

Secondly, legitimacy is also understood as stemming from a support from the civil society, from the diversity of people engaged, and from a wide participation. Asked to further their thoughts after briefly mentioning legitimacy, an interviewee explained:

> We have several levers for achieving legitimacy. The first is that we are structured around a manifesto, so a text on which we all agree, which defines our functioning, our objectives (…). And there are organisations who publicly support the initiative, and who then "sign the manifesto". (…). So there, the more we have this support, the more we are legitimate because we gather people, and when we gather people, we are listened to. Then we have a petition for citizens, for people to show their support to tell politicians (…) we agree with what these people say, these people being our Collective. And our third tool to build this legitimacy, it is to co-construct a demand that is common to all these people, whether interested citizens, interested organisations, etc, hence our contributive approach. (…) So it is this approach that contributes to constructing this legitimacy, because we arrive with a serious work, backed by a certain amount of people and organisations, and voilà. Then the more we have people participating the more legitimate we'll be. And so we construct this legitimacy by our participation level, by the diversity of people who participate, and by the seriousness of the approach. (Interview A).

These descriptions of legitimacy are aligned with Scharpf's (1999) understanding of legitimacy through the concepts of stakeholder input and output acceptability, according to which legitimacy comes from both the participation levels throughout the policy development and the acceptability of the policy by these stakeholders. The descriptions also emphasise inclusiveness, both in number and diversity of participants.

Finally, the interests of the actors involved, and how they relate to the interests of the citizens who they represent, also seem to be linked to legitimacy as understood by the collective. Especially, there is an emphasis on the fact that "the Collective for a CCC in AURA is a *citizen* group" (CCC-AURA 2021e, open letter, emphasis

added), with a process "issued from the civil society, independent from political parties" (CCC-AURA 2021d, Press Conference).

From the number of times it is mentioned, legitimacy seems to be a concept, and in this case a goal, of core importance for the collective. The Collective's understanding of legitimacy includes assumptions about democracy, power and interests, trust, knowledge, and participation, which therefore are all linked to the problem representation of the government's inability to cope with contemporary crises.

5.3.2. Democracy

As reflected upon in the concept review, democracy is a floating signifier with many facets. When describing what democracy means to them, the centrality of the role of citizens is a common theme amongst interviewees. For instance, Interviewee A explained

> Overall, it's the idea that the people take the decision, that's what inscribed in the work democracy. But then again that an 'empty' in itself, so we need to know how it incarnates. And you see that historically, at least in our country, it took the form of representative delegation of decision-making. There are other countries in which direct representation is more important. (Interviewee A)

When asked about the role of citizens in a democracy, the same interviewee developed:

> They're the sovereign, very simply. We are in a democracy, it is the people's sovereignty. That's what I was saying earlier, the question is to know how you incarnate this abstract ideal in something concrete, how do you give it shape, that's actually the real question. But ideally, since we're talking about ideals, citizens are the sovereigns, not the representatives. The representatives are the ones to whom you delegate power, you see, plus these days with the president we elected – but then again even before, right, in France we tend to elect a king. And because the Constitution is already fairly presidential, and because with the legislatives (elections) that follow a month behind the presidentials (elections), you end up with a Parliament which has the plethoric majority for the president, who then ends up doing what he wants for five years. And so we expect for the sovereign to be the president of the Republic, but actually it shouldn't be him, it should be the population who delegates their power to a sovereign. And the problem is that the mechanisms that enable this delegation to happen are seized today, hence the need to renew democratic practices. So yeah, citizens are actually the sovereign. (Interview A)

The underlying understanding of democracy is that based on the principle of citizen sovereignty, it should be the ideas of the people that are translated into laws. Yet, this interviewee recognises a necessity to see how an ideal works in practice – in this case how to practice democracy in everyday governance. The principle of

citizen sovereignty is here the basis for the understanding of democracy. In section 2.2, I described the state of democracy in France, emphasising the elitist model of governance defending expertism and placing the responsibility of failure on citizens. Yet, in the same interview, Interviewee A reflects on the ability of citizens differently, in the context of the proposals of the 150 citizens of the national CCC

> That's what was said: "yeah people are not ready to change, they don't want to give up their little comforts and that's why we're not going anywhere, etc". And actually, the Citizen Assembly showed it's the contrary, it showed that actually, people, when you ask them, when you present them with an issue, well then they identify what needs to be worked on, and they are ready to give up some stuff, and they also identify the more systemic problems that are linked to things that the lobbies are constantly trying not to dismantle. (Interview A)

This citizen-centred, inclusive definition of democracy explains the rejection of a model of governance based on exclusion and expertism, and supports the problem representation of inability to handle crisis and self-referentiality. In particular, this understanding of democracy can also provide the Collective with the perception that the reason for which the government does not respond 'appropriately' to the crisis is because of conflicts of interests in favour of elitism supporters, raising the question of party interests.

5.3.3. Power, Interests, and Trust

In line with the democratic assumptions, assumptions about the interests of different parties are visible in the material.

For instance, asked in a radio interview about the role of the executive in the CCC-AURA project, a member of the Collective explained

> The candidates have to situate themselves relatively to this citizen assembly. Since we have a legitimacy from the support of collectives, organisations, and citizens, our legitimacy has to be heard by the candidates to the regional elections. And we hope, we call them actually for a joint reflection between the citizen will and the political will, to work together for a good implementation of this CCC-AURA. (RCF 2021)

The distinction between the 'citizen will', called the 'common will' earlier in the same interview, and the 'political will', shows a perceived misalignment between the interests of citizens, and that of decision-makers.

This holds implications for the relationships between citizens and decision-makers, in particular for trust, as reflected by this statement from Interviewee B when asked about the characteristics of legitimacy for a non-partisan organisation

The fact that it is a citizen, non-partisan movement reassured collectives and citizens. Actually they were saying 'well, it's not just to get votes, it doesn't come from politics'. They don't trust politics anymore today. Because many people were disappointed, and we can see with the *Affaire du Siècle*[2], we can see that we can prove by A+B that what we do in France is not at all sufficient compared to everything we committed to, vis-à-vis all the international treaties we signed. And so there is a distrust, almost despair sometimes, people are giving up 'these political actions end with noting anyway, it's all talk'. And now, the fact that this is citizen, this Collective, it reassured a lot, and it gave the motivation for groups and organisations like GreenPeace, XR, or Youth For Climate, organisations like these, very activist, to join us to think about all that. (Interview B)

This quote illustrates the distrust that citizens hold for their representatives. Political actors are seen as submitted to rigid political and economic conflicts of interests, as "taken up in political games, in power games" (Interview A), and as not always acting in the interest of citizens. From this understanding that citizens and the executive have different, conflictual interests stems a general distrust for politicians, and more widely for the electoral logic. Pondering on whether the citizens drawn for the citizen assembly come as representatives of the rest of the population Interviewee E explained

I don't know if I'd say that they come as representatives. In a way, yes, a bit, since they will take decisions that will apply to all (…). So in a way, they have a representative role, but fundamentally, I don't think they are there to represent. Because they just come to give their opinion and think collectively, and participate in a decision-making process but as themselves, since actually what is interesting is what they bring to the process, and not who they will defend, will they manage to convince their electors that they acted and reacted in the right way… To get out of this electoral logic and 'people elected me to do that and that's what I need to do'. Here, no one elected them, no one ever told them to do this or that, they are not part of a political party, although they can be but as citizens of the assembly they aren't. So in a way they represent nothing else than themselves, and that's actually what we are after. (Interview E)

From there stems the assumption that having citizens representing nothing but their own personal interest is desirable.

In this line, the Collective's problem representations are underpinned by assumptions of power distribution. The current system's power distribution is seen as inadequate, with "the strategic core, the essential of decision, remains in the hands of elected reps" (Interview A). Instead, the Collective has a different ideal for this distribution: "we need to see participatory democracy as a real mean of taking democratic decisions, that are respected by people to whom we delegate decisional power and daily operations" (Interview A). This focus on this

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[2] A movement of activists who sued the French State for not taking ambitious enough climate action. In February 2021, the movement won the lawsuit, and is now waiting for the court to decide on whether they will force the State to take further climate action.

assumption that citizens should hold more decision-making power also draws on assumptions of knowledge.

5.3.4. Knowledge

In line with common assumptions held by proponents of deliberative democracy and citizen participation, and mirroring their problem representation and their policy, the Collective promotes pluralism and lay knowledge for informed decision-making. For instance, the Collective aims to include "diverse bodies and professions, diverse environmental reflections" (CCC-AURA 2021d, Press Conference) both in the drafting of the scoping document and in the future CCC-AURA, as "it is impossible to know everything" (Interview B). In the same context, Interviewee E mentions that

> Elected representatives all have a very similar curriculum, with people that don't necessarily know about the jobs of Mr & Mrs Everyone on the territory and sometimes they lack, and we blame them for not being aware enough of what's going on, on the ground. (Interview E)

This reflects an assumption that many perspectives and knowledges are needed to gain a holistic understanding of an issue, since "people may think about different aspects of a problem based on their lived experiences" (Interview E). This places value on the encounter of many angles of problematisation.

To take it further, this pluralism in itself also draws on the valuation of different kinds of knowledges, reflected in their will to "call upon those who live on that territory, who make it live, practitioners, organisations, that know it" (Interview B) as well as on "experts who know the territory because they study it" (ibid.). Without rejecting science and experts, it is on these grounds of pluralism that the Collective rejects elitism. According to one of the interviewees, it is "the conservatism of people who master the codes, who master a certain number of things, from which we struggle to take the space" (Interview D), and the exclusive decision-making processes and self-referentiality that the valuation of these "codes" generate within the political system.

Beyond the perceived value of lay knowledge, the access of lay-knowledge holders and the systemic barriers to their participation is also reflected upon: marginalised populations "don't feel legitimate to intervene" (Interview D) in a political arena dominated by "old white men" - this reference to decision-makers being overwhelmingly white, aged, and male individuals is a reoccurring theme brought by the interviewees (Interviews B, C, and D).

An interesting thing to note that takes its importance when looking at presuppositions is that despite the Collective's will to let citizens decide what is

needed for the future, one of the interviewees mentioned, talking about the results of the National CCC, that "if you look at the proposals of the 150 (citizens drawn by sortition), there you see that we are already more consistent with what we need to go towards" (Interview A). This presupposition of what success is in practice may have underpinned the understanding of a government, not necessarily unable to cope with contemporary crises, but at least not willing or able to steer society in the direction deemed desirable by this interviewee and the change discourse to which they adhere.

5.3.5. Assumption implications

To summarise, assumptions about whose knowledge is valued, whose interest should be prevalent, and the importance of direct democracy in society underpin the representation of the problem. As a reminder, the problem identified and acted upon by the Collective is the inadequacy of the current political system to cope with contemporary crises, be it democratic, or environmental.

The Collective's understanding of democracy embraces the potential plurality of criteria and definitions of democracy as understood by citizens, yet a constant in their speeches is the centrality of the role of citizens in that system. Additionally, the Collective rejects the exclusiveness of science as the informant of policymaking and adds informal and local knowledge to the scope of valued information. In practice, this pluralism is reflected in the deliberative methods proposed, with an approach aiming to generate consent through the acknowledgment of different knowledges and perspectives.

This perceived value of local- and citizen-knowledge also explains the ideological difference that is the ground for the rejection of the government's self-referentiality and thus ability to cope with crises. As a response, the Collective's action is focused on the inclusion of members of society and the "respect" of their voices, both in their activities to develop the scoping document, and on their projections for the citizen assembly.

6. Discussion

This paper is based at the nodal points of several phenomena, including political distrust in France, a European trend supporting public participation, a failed experiment of citizen assembly in France, and the creation of a Collective to advocate for a replication of a similar citizen assembly, at the regional level, by environmental activists. In this context, I proposed that conducting a policy analysis on this activist movement may provide insights into new expectations for democratic governance of environmental resources, especially when compared to the national CCC.

In the previous chapters, I have looked at how actors of the Collective perceive the project of the CCC-AURA in relation to current models of governance. Responding to my first question, I found out that the problem representation of the Collective, to which the CCC-AURA project was developed as response, was the inability for the current government to cope with contemporary crises. This problem representation entailed different facets, such as the climate urgency, the lack of trust in political institutions, the self-referentiality of the government, and the lack of appropriate mechanisms of governance. Building on this problem representation, I contrasted it against that of the current government practices to inform my second research question and found out that the national CCC emerged as a response from the government to a context and a perceived problem fundamentally different from that of the CCC-AURA project, explaining the goal and process contrasts. I also looked at the Collective's and at the government's assumptions linked to democratic governance. My findings highlighted that these assumptions are time-bound, integrated in a historical context of the French model of governance, yet increasingly challenged by European influences, producing dynamic power effects. Finally, and building on these findings, I explored the aspects proposed by the Collective for an alternative model of democratic environmental governance and found out the perceived importance of pluralism in informing both agenda-setting and policymaking, thus placing the interests of citizens at the centre of governance. The importance of a form of more direct democracy was also highlighted, contrasting with the current aggregative model.

In this chapter, I further the analysis to provide a deeper understanding of this proposal for an alternative model of environmental governance, building on the effects and the dissemination of the problem representation and underpinning assumptions described in the findings. Next, I discuss my analysis vis-à-vis existing research and reflect on the contribution but also the limitations of this paper, and on possible ways to pursue the research. Finally, I ponder on how my analysis can be of use to facilitate the dialogue between the civil society and political institutions and democratise environmental governance.

6.1. Effects and dissemination of the Collective's proposal

6.1.1. Effects: responsibility, agency, and subjectivity

As described in parts 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, both CCCs come based on different problem representations and assumptions, which bears effects on the power distribution amongst actors for decision-making, agency, and subjectivities.

The national CCC was based on the understanding that citizens need support from the government to help them become more environmentally sustainable, a support which was rejected by the citizens. In this understanding, it is not necessary to give a voice or an opportunity to participate to the subjects, ie the citizens, as they are only the recipients of a policy, and don't have the knowledge necessary to partake in decision-making. The national CCC came as a 'solution' to the issue of the citizens rejecting policies, as a way of producing policy proposals that would prove agreeable by the population. In contrast, the CCC-AURA project came as a response to a need for counter-power, as a response to the identified problem of self-referentiality, both as defined by Luhmann (1995) as the government concentrating power in all forms, and by Blühdorn (2007) as acting in favour of an international dominant neoclassical discourse and brought a more central role ideal for citizens. From there, I interpret the shift of problematisation onto the government' ability to respond to challenges in society as a direct response to and rejection of the mainstream neoclassical and oligarchic discourses, which place the responsibility and the blame of climate change onto citizens yet excluding them from participating in decision-making, based on expertism rationales. This response draws directly from a discourse shared by alternative sustainability discourses in fields such as environmental lobbying (Bøgelund 2007) and heterodox pluralist economics (Lawson 2006). It is therefore not a surprising nor new problematisation for an activist group.

These oppositions in problem representation and on the understanding of who needs to change their practices calls upon the theme of power, through agency and subjectivities.

In terms of agency, in the national CCC case, depicting citizens as subjects to be acted upon does not reflect any possibilities for citizens to meaningfully contribute to policymaking, hence retaining a form of power even when experimenting a citizen assembly model – for example by filtering proposals. This contributes to perpetuating the concentration of power at the top, reinforcing self-referentiality. Framing the problem as it does, the government also structures the argument to blame citizen behaviour, away from corporate, industrial, and governmental practices, while reinforcing its own legitimacy. I made the case earlier of the recurrence of legitimacy in the government's discourse. According to Pitkin (1965), the discursive use of legitimacy and of responsibility allocation can contribute to reinforcing the positions of a powerholder. On the other hand, depicting them as an active party in decision-making through mechanisms of participation that value the knowledge and opinions they bring, as is the goal of the Collective, creates dynamics of empowerment and shifts the focus on fostering agency amongst citizens, to allow them to access political arenas and ensuring the continuation and consideration of their contributions, while yet recognising a responsibility of climate crisis management to the government.

Looking at the subjectivities created by a policy enables to understand the Section 2.2 presents the current French governance model, based on a rationale of elitism, and how this view produces a concentration of the decision-making power at the top of the government hierarchy, a view challenged by the Collective in their problem representation and policy. This challenge frames the conversation on new subjectivities for all actors, impacting their 'understandings of themselves and of the issues" (Bacchi in Bletsas & Beasley 2012:22). In *Policy Analysis*, Bacchi emphasised the importance of what she refers to as 'subjectification effects' (Bacchi 2009:16), i.e., the social relationships that are defined through discourses. Looking at the power distribution dynamics of the current French governance practices and that of the CCC-AURA project, the analysis shows that the subjectivities created for the executive and the civil society in the current French model of governance are confronted and reshuffled by the Collective.

Having built their movement on a power-centred critique of the governmental practices, it is interesting to note that the Collective's policy is in fact power-sensitive, in that it creates discursive spaces to examine and redefine power relations, as they for instance through the scoping document. This reflection shapes the civil society's understanding of the issue as power-related, and of themselves, through the collaborative practices of the Collective, as having a central role in

environmental governance. Among the tasks linked to this central role for the civil society are the definition of what democratic practices are, but also defining what should be talked about (agenda-setting), and monitoring governance activities. These last two activities are traditionally a Parliamentarian responsibility, which I will reflect on in section 6.2, where I explore the implications for governance. The focus on monitoring activities reflected in the practices of the Collective fosters attention onto the influence of the executive in decision-making, and bounces a citizen-centred ideal off the reality of current practices. This also contributes to reinforcing the attention onto the power distribution and subjectivities.

These differences in agency and subjectivities between the CCC-AURA project and the national governance practices stem of course from different assumptions about democracy and governance (see 2.2, 2.3 and 5.3.5), yet I propose an additional reason for these contrasts. As explained in the introduction and in 2.3, the national CCC was launched as a direct response to a conflict criticising a government environmental taxation policy targeting citizens. As such, a goal of the national CCC was to display participative decision-making processes, to smother that conflict, in parallel to obtaining climate policies not opposed by citizens. In contract, the CCC-AURA was launched because a citizen assembly was seen as a mechanism to harness the benefits of deliberative democracy into concrete climate adaptation and mitigation policies. Thus, the perceived value of citizen assemblies and of participatory democracy is different. As the government understands, it is only necessary to involve citizens enough, so they do not oppose policies. As the Collective understands, the more participation and influence citizens hold, the more ambitious, relevant, and inclusive the policies will be.

6.1.2. Production, dissemination and contestation of the Collective's proposals

The problem representation acted upon by the Collective is not the dominant one, as it comes as a fairly recent contestation of the traditional discourse viewing voting for the government as the main role of the citizen in governance processes. This can actually be related to the Foucauldian view of power confrontations as creative and constitutive through the fostering of resistance (Foucault 1980), since the movement established itself based on a problem representation centred around the rejection of a dominant discourse.

The ways and locations through which the Collective's problem representation is disseminated and defended are also interesting. Discursively, the genre used by the Collective to self-represent and communicate about their work is political and ideological, with a vocabulary not without reminding that of a political programme. Texts produced by the Collective also draw on strategies from political debates and

speeches, with critics of the opposing party or ideology. Yet, in some texts and especially when these are addressed to citizens outside the Collective's organisation, and through social media, the vocabulary and grammatical characteristics of their messages is less formal than that used by political institutions, reflecting the activist aspect of the Collective's identity (Gerbaudo 2012). The Collective draws on both political and activist discourses and strategies. I interpret this as a reflection of their aspiration to link civil society and governmental institutions. Indeed, drawing on only one discourse could mean for them to lose the attention or credibility of the actors situated in the other discourse. By drawing on both political and activist discourses, the Collective situates itself as this link between civil society and governmental institutions and remains credible to both parties in their role to act upon the problem representation.

This credibility is also reinforced by the context in which the CCC-AURA project emerged. Indeed, the dissemination of their problem representation is largely executed via activist and transition networks, and the academic interest born onto participative democracy, yet also by wider outreach media outlets. This means that the problem representation is increasingly easy to access even for groups outside of the producing sphere, and that the discourse may trend towards a normative understanding of democracy as understood by these actors.

Yet, the problem representation on which the Collective is grounded can be and is also contested.

At this point, it is worth remembering that the Collective's problem representation already comes as a counter-discourse to the dominant one, which is the government's. Yet, the government's expressed rationale for not engaging with interest groups, is that these may not represent the interests of the majority of the population. While the government's position can be criticised on many points, it is an interesting point; the Collective, like many other activist organisations, are rather homogenous in the profile of their members, and may therefore only project the problem representation of a specific portion of the population. Democratic expectations are not uniform, and citizens may disagree among themselves about what democratic practices and democratic decision-making should look like. By representing the government's self-referentiality as a problem, and therefore aiming to increase citizen input in decision-making via a citizen assembly, the Collective produces a solution at its image, with characteristics that make it a viable solution for their profiles. This point is also backed by research that confirms that citizen engagement in political life is mostly fostered in fields of higher socio-economic status (Bühlmann 2006), mainly because the skills valued for both access and participation correspond the cultural capital of these classes. Habermas (1985) does propose an ideal speech situation that aims at levelling such power disbalances, yet

these remain theoretical and impossible to practice (Connelly et al 2006). This comes as a challenge for the inclusiveness values of the Collective and for democratic governance, as I comment on in 6.2.

Another ground for challenge emerges when bearing a critical look onto the problem representation to identify the gaps in the discourse, i.e., the potential alternative problem representations. This relates to the fourth question asked in Bacchi's framework, 'What is left unproblematic in this representation?' and is central to the analysis since it sheds light on which discourses may be more visible than marginalised ones. Here, an alternative to understanding the problem representation as residing in the government's practices could be to instead question the motivation of citizens to engage in political activities. Viewing it as such, i.e. as citizens not being motivated to take part in political life, the policy of the Collective comes as a misaligned response, since citizens may also not be interested in engaging via this new model. In this case, the response seems rather radical, since it relies on applying an external pressure onto citizens to make them participate, rather than fostering intrinsic motivations. Yet, the collaborative approach taken by the Collective may foster the discursive space to voice a misalignment between the interests of different groups.

6.2. Implications for environmental governance

In this section, I draw on the analysis and discussion to provide insights on the implications for environmental governance, based on the demands and expectations for democratic governance practices reflected by the proposal for a CCC-AURA. I hope for these results and the following implications to be a solid ground for policymakers and for the Collective to improve environmental governance in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes.

The proposal of the Collective is centred around the democratic ideal of a more active and powerful role for citizens, with access to political arenas beyond voting for a government once every five years, bringing new knowledge and perspectives to deliberative arenas even when they are not aligned with a governmental ideal, and having the means to question and define democratic practices. These democratic expectations are two-sided. On one side, citizens expect to be involved in the definition and design of democratic practices. This expectation attributes them the power to challenge practices that are no longer in line with what they consider as democratic and legitimate. On the other side, citizens expect to be involved in all phases of policymaking, in a shift towards more participatory or even direct democracy. Although there already instances, at all scales of governance, of citizen participation in the design of policy in France, this is not true

for the design of governance practices. In France today, once such practices are established, citizens do not have accessible channels through which to challenge these practices. This is misaligned with the inherent dynamism of democracy and reflects the importance of the momentum created by both the national CCC and the CCC-AURA project in their potential for asking for a realignment of governance practices to contemporary democratic expectations. In practice, this holds implications for current powerholders: the national CCC and the CCC-AURA projects have created a discursive space in which to start this conversation. Although coming from the civil society, the CCC-AURA explicitly expressed its will to engage in the conversation in partnership with the executive. For policymakers, this comes as an opportunity to through constructive dialogues, realign practices with democratic expectations, legitimise the input of the civil society, and re-strengthen a two-directional trust between political institutions and civil society. Worth noting is that the goal of the national CCC, which was to create climate policies that would not be opposed by the people, is also compatible with these proposals, since legitimacy stems from the involvement of the civil society and citizen-centred processes.

In the democratic vision mirrored by the CCC-AURA, organisations from the civil society take up the role of Parliament. This institutional body, elected through direct election, has four major roles: representation, legislation, budgeting, and oversight. Yet, the material proved the lack of citizen trust in the Parliament, to reflect citizens' voices and interests, to pass adequate legislation, and to hold the government accountable for its practices. Instead, these roles are viewed as potentially better fulfilled by citizens from the civil society, especially in functions of government oversight, and interest representation. The analysis proved the civil society to be more trusted by the Collective than governmental institutions on many levels, including following scientific recommendations, representing citizens' interests, and being inclusive in their practices. Although this does not necessarily mean the end of the Parliamentary institution, this does point at a need for a renewal of democratic practices, to re-establish the necessary political trust between members of Parliament and their constituency. The representation of citizens is at the core of parliamentarians' activities, and yet these activities are perceived as misaligned with the interests of the people. Here again, the current practices are challenged and need to be addressed. Powerholders, including parliamentarians, should refocus their representational activities and ensure that their practices uphold the democratic values of their constituency, and are power- and lived experiences-sensitive, transparent, accountable, and inclusive. Interestingly, in theory, this does not suggest a new role for the Parliament but rather a return to the initial role of Parliament, as a relay between the people and other political institutions. In practice, this reflects the perceived inability to represent of the institution. Through the CCC-AURA project, 'democratic practice' is therefore given a new meaning,

shifting from the election of representatives every five years to the genuine power delegation and participation of citizens in environmental governance.

Although the case studied here is a case of citizen assembly, it is worth remembering that the CCC-AURA project developed to build on the momentum of an existing citizen assembly at the national level. As this research shows, the Collective's demands and expectations for democracy can align with models of citizen assembly. However, and as shown two paragraphs above, the Collective's proposal can also be interpreted as the opening of a discursive space for democratic innovation for a green transition, to reflect these democratic expectations and demands. As such, the model of citizen assembly should be seen by powerholders as one of the ways forward, yet not necessarily as the only one that would match what citizens consider as democratic environmental governance. Here again, as an implication for powerholders but also for civil society, I therefore recommend seizing the opportunity and momentum created by the CCCs to establish long-term, inclusive arenas and channels to engage in constructive dialogue with stakeholders across society and ensure that environmental governance models remain challengeable.

Also worth noting for powerholders is that the fact that this problem representation is embedded in European trends and increasingly represented in various media (2.2), suggests that the expectations and demands of democratic governance articulated by the Collective are becoming increasingly normalised. This has significant implications since it means that, if governments fail to adapt their practices to follow the dynamism of democratic expectations, the democratic crisis in France will only grow.

6.3. Further research

This research integrates a field of work on democratic innovations, and more specifically on citizen assemblies. As highlighted in part 1, it however adopts an approach to the study of these that had not, to my knowledge, been applied before. This research therefore complements the existing literature in two ways.

First, this research confirms and complement works which explored practical characteristics of citizen assemblies. For instance, having uncovered similar results from a different geographical and actors' point of view, this paper confirms the proposal of Devaney et al (2020) that in the context of the climate crisis, citizen assemblies are a governance model appropriate for tackling complex public policies, include citizens in policymaking, and strengthen the democratic trust.

Secondly, this research provides a basis and framework of investigation of democratic innovations for green transitions, for further research and continuously improved governance. Through this paper, I proved the relevance of using a power- and subjectivity- sensitive policy analysis framework to understand and critically examine the claims of various actors throughout society, to facilitate their inclusion in governance practices.

However, and because of the relativist standpoint adopted in this research (see 3.1), the case described and analysed in this paper is situated in a specific geographic and temporal context. As such, it reflects the demands and expectations of the Collective and actors directly studied and may not apply to citizens outside the Collective.

Democracy is a dynamic, normative concept also situated in a geographic and temporal context. As such, directions for future research may explore the same topic, in different contexts. This may be especially in Europe, given that the case I studied was influenced by European trends for public participation. As such, with sufficient resources, one could explore whether this European trend had similar effects on the understanding and demands for democratic governance in other countries or regions, or how the historical and cultural background of a specific country or region may have in fact competed with this European trend. The afore mentioned similarities between the findings of Devaney et al (2020) studying the case of the Irish Citizen Assembly, and the findings of this paper studying a different region, are an intriguing starting point for a research exploring just that.

On the short-term, I hope for my results and practical implications to inform research and governance practices on citizen expectations and demand for a democratic model of environmental governance in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes. On the longer-term, I hope to see more research examining claims for activist groups using the WPR framework, to keep track of the expectations and demands that these groups have and thus facilitate their inclusion in policy-making arenas.

7. Summary

This paper started from several phenomena interlinked with each other. These include the urgency of the climate crisis, and the political distrust between citizens and their government. As a response to the Yellow Vests conflict, the French government initiated a citizen assembly. Following this response, a Collective of citizens organised to advocate for the replication of the citizen assembly at a regional scale. The interest factor in this case was two-folded: it is unlike the French government to implement public participation mechanisms, and the outcome of the national CCC was deemed a failure by several parties. What then could explain the interest of the civil society for such a model? In a policy analysis, using Bacchi's What's the Problem Represented to be? approach, I examined the project for a regional CCC to understand the expectations of these actors vis-à-vis this model of citizen assembly, and how it reflects new expectations and demands for democratic practices of environmental governance.

Departing from the problem representation of the Collective, I explored the assumptions underpinnings and effects of the CCC-AURA, and analysed them in their power relations contexts. Especially interesting and valuable to mention given the aim of this study is the power awareness of the Collective, both when producing critiques of current governance models, and when talking about their vision for democratic environmental governance. In line with this, a central theme in the expectations and demands for democratic environmental governance is the need to refocus the democratic practices around the knowledge and interests of citizens.

These understandings, assumptions and ideals of the citizen assembly, and more generally of democratic governance practices, are both constituted and constitutive. On one hand, they draw on previous examples of democratic innovations in France and abroad and are supported both by discourses of public participation in European politics and in academia, and by the feminist and pluralist discourses found across activist networks. On the other hand, the Collective provides a counter-narrative opposing the dominant discourse, and re-imagines democratic processes in their region.

I conclude that the main reason why the model of Citizen Assembly generated enthusiasm across the population and activist groups, is because the vision and ideals of the CCCs attribute trust and legitimacy, but also more agency to citizen capacities, in contrast to the elitist French governance model. Looking at the implications for governance, I argue that both the Collective and the regional government would gain by exploiting the momentum created by the CCCs to jointly create arenas for constructive dialogue on the renewal of democratic practices.

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