Citizen agency in democratic reform:
towards substantive and sustainable democratic innovation*

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I. Introduction

A member of a local citizens' group phoned one of us recently. They want to develop an MP performance report card so people can evaluate their local MP (and MPs elsewhere) not only on the basis of funding and large projects like roads brought into their districts, but on how they engage and connect with their constituents and represent them in their parliamentary business. In other words, they want to create a public reporting system to collect and synthesize data on the constituency and parliamentary activities of each MP, and make these publically available.

One could interpret this proposal as a group of crazy citizens trying to tinker around the edges of electoral democracy. But we contend it is indicative of how local citizens around the world are trying to take democratic reform — broadly understood — into their own hands. Frustrated with the status quo, citizens seed and push along novel approaches for improving the procedures for achieving collective outcomes, whether that be more responsive elected representatives, cleaner energy, or a more effective criminal justice system.

In this paper we examine and characterize these citizen-led, action-oriented, and highly pragmatic forms of democratic innovation. We are particularly interested in the collective journeys that citizens embark on to address and resolve public problems. Central to this particular form of democratic innovation is that citizens exercise considerable agency; they instigate the initiatives, they develop simple replicable participatory approaches for engaging other citizens, and they coordinate sustained collective projects that do 'public work' (Boyte 2004). Understanding how citizen-led approaches to democratic reform emerge and are sustained is an important task against the backdrop of popular disaffection with conventional politics.

This paper deepens our understanding of how citizens pursue and enact democratic reform. This represents a broader research topic that we have both been pursuing separately and together over the past few years (Dzur 2018a and 2018b; Hendriks and Dzur 2015; Hendriks 2017). This research has led us to contend that scholars and practitioners of democratic innovation, here we include ourselves, need to shift focus away from how to optimize participatory designs (e.g. Dryzek and Hendriks 2012) and where to 'fit' novel forums into institutions of representative democracy (e.g. Hendriks 2016a). Instead we need to think more broadly about multiple pathways to democratic reform, including reform within existing mainstream political and governance institutions as well as outside.

From the outset we acknowledge that participatory institutions can contribute to democratic reform, for example by engaging 'hard to reach' publics in complex policy debates, and by creating conditions for deliberation where citizens shift policy preferences and learn civic skills (e.g. Gastil and Levine 2005; Nabatchi et al 2012). In some rare cases citizens are empowered to make collective decisions (Fung and Wright 2003). However, we also take seriously their limitations, especially for promoting and sustaining democratic reform (e.g. Goodin and Dryzek 2006; Michels 2011; Papadopoulos and Warin 2007), and their vulnerability to cooptation by large-scale economic forces and neoliberal governance tendencies (Lee, McQuarrie, and Walker 2015). We also agree with some critics, who argue that public engagement efforts have the potential to corrode democratic politics by constraining citizen agency to the narrow norms and practices of deliberative forums (Eliasoph 2013; Lee 2015).

Our primary goal in this paper is to empirically explore the shape, role and significance of citizen agency in the messy 'real world' of democratic innovation. We are particularly interested in democratic reform pathways instigated and owned by citizen themselves. For empirical insights we study four cases where citizens have taken a collective and participatory approach to working on public problems. In each case we examine how citizens activate a collective reform process, how they resource and sustain it over time, and to what effect. By examining practical grassroots reform efforts, we are well-placed to understand what aspects of contemporary institutional practice frustrate citizens, what kinds of reforms they wish to see, and how they wish to achieve and sustain them.

Our secondary goal is to develop a conceptual map that differentiates different pathways to democratic reform. More specifically, we map how citizen agency varies across different forms of democratic innovation, and related civic practices, such as activism, community organising, and volunteer work. In contrast to many conceptual frameworks in the fields of public engagement (e.g. IAP2 2007), and democratic innovation (e.g. Fung 2006), our map is inductive (rather than normative), and developed from our empirical studies of citizen-led democratic reform. This map offers a useful orientation for scholars and practitioners of democratic innovation to help draw connections with related fields and identify common resources and barriers.

We begin by defining what we mean by the terms 'democratic innovation' and 'citizen agency'. Next, we discuss four empirical cases of citizen-led governance reforms, and then identify common features of citizen agency across the cases. We then use these empirical findings to map different pathways to democratic reform and civic engagement. To conclude we consider the implications of our findings for debates on democratic innovation and, more broadly, deliberative democracy.

II. Refocusing democratic innovation: from forum design to citizen agency

To date, academic discussions on democratic innovation have principally focused on the design and implementation of novel participatory forums (e.g. Geissel and Newton 2012). Consider, for example, Smith's definition of democratic innovations: *'institutions that have been specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process'* (2009, 1, emphasis in original). Scholars have paid considerable attention to how norms of ideal deliberation might be institutionalized, via a range of experiments sharing similar commitments to inclusion, rationality, and equality (e.g. Nabatchi et al. 2012; Karpowitz and Raphael 2014). This emphasis has resulted in the development of innovative deliberative designs, such as mini-publics, and ongoing real-world experimentation with these around the globe (Grönlund et al. 2014; Gastil and Levine 2005).

That discussions on democratic innovation have been focused on novel citizens' forums is understandable; and in some cases necessary for structuring inclusive policy deliberation (Dryzek and Hendriks 2012). Yet in practice one-off citizens' forums demonstrate limited capacity to promote and sustain democratic reform. Most deliberative democrats concede that in practice many citizens' forums struggle to be noticed or taken seriously by relevant decision makers and institutions (e.g. Goodin and Dryzek 2006; Michels 2011; Papadopoulos and Warin 2007). Indeed the emerging picture from growing empirical research is one of limited connectivity: too often citizens' forums are disconnected from relevant conventional participatory and deliberative spaces, and this reduces their capacity to influence decision makers and public debate more broadly (e.g.

Davidson and Elstub 2014; McLaverty 2009; Hoppe 2011). In sum, innovative deliberative forums tend to be processes on the margins of formal government and electoral politics.

Recently, critics of democratic innovations such as citizens' forums argue that they are no match for neoliberal forces of privatization, as, to some degree, innovations have been propelled forward by these forces (Lee, McQuarrie, and Walker 2015). Academic advocates of democratic innovation have been naïve about economic power, these critics suggest, leaving so-called 'best practices' to work to the advantage of elites (McQuarrie 2012; 2013; Walker 2015). Deliberative forums and other such innovations have helped legitimate the off-loading of public sector responsibilities on to the private sector and to individual citizens who may not be able to shoulder them (Eliasoph 2013). When forums go well, they tend to reinforce norms of individual action to the detriment of potentially more efficacious social movement collective action; when they go poorly, they breed cynicism and pessimism, which are also demobilizing (Eliasoph 2013; Lee 2015).

Our novel contribution in this paper falls between these extremes. While we recognise the contributions participatory institutions can make to democratic reform, we acknowledge that they can unintentionally depress, constrain, and contort citizen agency in certain regular, patterned ways. Rather than seeking to optimize participatory forums, our focus here is on how citizens themselves are creating new forms of democratic self-governance, whether inside traditional public institutions, alongside them, or outside them. We are particularly interested in forms of democratic self-governance that create reproducible methods and practices that can be shared via nodes and networks. We label these '**citizen-led governance innovations**' (CLGIs) and they are characterized by concrete, generative, lasting innovative reforms. In our understanding this kind of governance innovation is not just a momentary expression of citizen agency or one-off group action that flickers and fades out after an initial round of energy and involvement. Rather, it is something that helps foster more or better agency in time and space; an innovation can help generate and transfer knowledge; it can become part of public memory; it can be sustained. Furthermore we conceptualise democratic innovation as something connected to state and civil society but not 'owned' by state officials or agencies, on the one hand, or by civil society organisations or movements, on the other.

We concentre on forms of agency where citizens take on, and seek to resolve — not just participate in — traditional public policy problems, for example in criminal justice, welfare, and energy. Instead of coming together to clean up a park, they are generating energy via solar power. Instead of helping out with a police department's neighborhood watch program, they are setting up a community justice program to resolve conflicts on their own. Here 'agency' is understood as shared responsibility for social problems, performance of tasks related to addressing them, and deliberation over how to proceed, all as part of normal life not extraordinary or rare or at the behest of officials. It is routine and regular power sharing. Agency is thus manifested by substantive, not symbolic, citizen contributions to a collective decision or public policy.

We turn now to explore four practical cases of citizen-led governance innovation.

III. Four case examples of citizen-led governance innovations (CLGIs)

Case 1: citizens doing social work (Orange Sky Australia)

Many citizen-led governance innovations are rooted in citizens' desire to address a pressing public policy problem. Often these are complex or systemic social problems that have been neglected or mismanaged by existing state and civil society organisations. In some contexts, everyday citizens self-organise and do 'public work' (Boyte 2004) by taking practical steps to address policy problems. When such community initiatives are open and participatory, they can evolve into governance innovations that display deep democratic qualities. Below we discuss one such case.

Orange Sky Australia (OSA) began in 2014 as an initiative of two individual citizens, Nic Marchesi and Lucas Patchett, who installed a couple of washing machines and dryers in an old van, and travelled around the city of Brisbane offering free laundry facilities to those living on the street. As they explain:[1]

> With an aim to improve hygiene standards and restore dignity to people doing it tough, [we] stumbled on something much bigger and more significant – the power of a conversation.

Four years later OSA has snowballed into a nation-wide governance innovation, that engages over 800 volunteers in 121 locations around Australia.[2] Rather than make loud noises for governments and church groups to do more about homelessness, OSA's approach is deeply pragmatic; it has designed a relatively simple replicable method of engaging everyday citizens in practical projects for social change. Volunteers in OSA work collectively to provide marginalised people in their community with some simple basic human services (such as shelter and hygiene). In some locations OSA also offers free shower services, or they partner with food vans, so that, while people wait for their washing, they can access a free cooked meal.

In contrast to many social change activist organisations, the political and democratic reform goals of OSA are not front and centre. Indeed OSA intentionally does not want to be understood as a political association (OSA 2016 p. 26):

> We are not politically or religiously associated, just everyday people in the community. Our one purpose is to positively connect the community…. Our volunteers are not there to fix anything, sell anything or preach anything but purely provide a platform to reconnect people with the community.

Yet, we contend that OSA is engaged in deeply political work; it has strong social change agenda, and is committed to reframing public perceptions of homelessness.

The political and democratic reform work of OSA is subtle and occurs in different ways. First and foremost, OSA vans are practical and social hubs where marginalized people in the community can get something done (e.g. washing). But, OSA is offering far more than clean clothes and improved hygiene for the homeless; it is a citizen-led governance innovation that is driven by a commitment to social change through community building. As the co-founder Lucas Prachett explains (quoted in Browne 2015):

> The first thing we all do in the morning is put a fresh set of clean clothes on…Everyone's made of the same stuff. We think everyone should have that same basic human right.

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[1] 'About Us' http://www.orangeskylaundry.com.au/ Accessed 13 March 2018.
[2] 'What we do', http://www.orangeskylaundry.com.au/what-we-do Accessed 18 March 2018.

Secondly, the activities of OSA are about changing perceptions in the broader community about homelessness. This is done primarily through its popular volunteer program. OSA also seeks to break down the stigma of homelessness by listening to, and putting on the public record, the stories of ordinary people in extraordinarily dire circumstances on the street. It gives voice to various homeless people across Australia by retelling their stories and publishing their poems, for example in its Annual Report (e.g. OSA 2016) and in a published book it sells.[3]

To pursue its social change goals OSA has adopted a relatively simple and replicable governance model. In each location, the OSA requires 1) infrastructure (such as mobile orange vans equipped with washing machines/dryers/showers), and 2) volunteers to assist people. Each van comes with a number of orange chairs which are for people to sit on while they wait for their washing to finish (OSA 2016 p.5):

> Orange Sky Laundry [OSA] is a catalyst for conversation. In the one-hour time it takes to wash and dry someone's clothes there is absolutely nothing to do but sit down on one of our 6 orange chairs and have a positive and genuine conversation between our everyday volunteers and everyday friends on the street.

Herein lies the participatory core of the OSA model that is driven by the desire to create opportunities to form connections with homeless people through conversations. Volunteers are empowered (and trained) with skills to sit down with homeless people and start conversations, connections form, and possibilities for social change open up (OSL 2016 p. 3):

> The humble orange van and six orange chairs have broken down barriers in communities all over Australia. Powerful bonds have positively changed the lives of many people, some are friends on the street, some are our volunteers. There are many stories, some are heartwarming and empowering, others are surprising and confronting. Unfortunately, many stories are heart-wrenchingly sad.

People on the streets are also now becoming volunteers themselves and are working within the organisation and learning new skills (OSA 2016).

OSA's approach to governance is not only participatory but also cross-sectoral. It is willing to work with collaborators (state or non-state) who support its mission including local and state government organisations, religious groups, charities and corporations (OSA 2016 p. 24-25):

> Orange Sky aims to reduce the strain on resources and do so with many other like minded service providers... These service providers range from large charities, school groups, small community service providers and everyone in between. All of these groups are critical to the success of Orange Sky ...[they help us achieve] our mission of positively connecting people who are homeless.

OSA has also expanded its assistance to the homeless by partnering with other organisations to offer people on the street training and employment opportunities (OSA 2016).

Orange Sky Australia's remarkable expansion from one to 121 locations in just four years (between 2014 and 2018) demonstrates how a small citizen-led initiative can evolve into a nation-wide governance innovation. Today, OSA organises a growing group of people around Australia who are committed to supporting homeless people by offering them some of life's basic needs: clean clothes and a conversation. This kind of "public work", we contend is democratically innovative and significant; it has created thousands of platforms for citizens in the community to connect, have a conversation and create social change.

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[3] See, for example, 'Buy OrangeSky Stories' https://store.orangeskylaundry.com.au/Accessed 13 March 2018

Case 2: citizens generating executive services and reform (Som Energia)

Some citizen-led governance innovations emerge around policy issues where there has been a lack of policy leadership or regulation, for example in supporting or regulating energy services, food production, health and aged care. In response, citizens may self-organise to create cooperatives or initiatives that have been variously labelled as civic enterprises, or social innovations (see Wagenaar et al 2015). Our second case explores the democratic experiences of a Spanish renewable energy cooperative, Som Energia, which is exemplary of thousands of community energy projects that have emerged worldwide over the past decade, particularly in Europe (Bauwens et al 2016) but also elsewhere (Hoffman and High-Pippert 2010; MacArthur 2016, Wey et al 2016).[4] Here we are particularly interested in how Som Energia adopted participatory structures to build and successfully sustain two goals: 1) to generate and deliver renewable energy services, and 2) to advocate for energy policy reform.

Som Energia is a community cooperative that produces and supplies electricity to its members from small-scale renewable sources, such as solar and biogas. It began in late 2010 as Spain's first energy cooperative with around 150 local citizens from north-east Catalonia (Riutort Isern in Wagenaar et al 2015). Som Energia emerged in a context where there was rising popular frustration with the failure of large energy companies (and state regulators) to provide affordable renewable energy. The founding members of the cooperative were also committed to addressing rising energy poverty in Spain, due to escalating electricity prices in flailing economy with high unemployment.

Since 2010 the cooperative has grown into a nationwide cooperative with members and services across Spain. As at March 2018 it has over 45,000 members,[5] and throughout 2018 it is expected to serve over 60,000 homes and businesses, and bill over 30million Euros.[6] With a widespread and growing membership base, Som Energia has established a broad and legitimate platform in Spain for its policy advocacy on renewable energy reforms (Riutort Isern in Wagenaar et al 2015).

The founders of Som Energia adopted a cooperative organisational model, based on the principles democratic control and citizen participation.[7] To become a member and user of the cooperative, citizens pay 100Euro. Collectively all the members own and operate the cooperative. Decisions on major strategic issues are taken through a voting procedure of the General Assembly which is composed of all members. Each member has one vote regardless of their financial contribution. More day to day operational issues are overseen by a steering committee (or Governing Council) composed of six volunteer members, with the support of a larger technical team (For a fuller account, see Riutort Isern in Wagenaar et al 2015).

Active participation of Som Energia members is encouraged at the local level through specific local groups, of which there currently 72 active across Spain.[8] Local groups play a number of crucial roles in the cooperative. They organise events in the community, provide information and run workshops,

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[4] Much of the empirical research on community energy has been conducted in northern European countries, such as Denmark and Germany, where there is a long history of consensual decision making and civic cooperation. Here we consider the enactment of citizen agency in an energy cooperative in Spain, where political debate typically takes a more adversarial and combative tone (Gambetta 1998).

[5] https://www.somenergia.coop

[6] Blog Post, 27 May 2017 'Som Energia expects to bill 30 million euros this year and provide electricity service to more than 60,000 homes and businesses'
https://blog.somenergia.coop/comunicados-prensa/2017/05/ndp-som-energia-preve-facturar-este-ano-30-millones-de-euros-y-dar-servicio-de-electricidad-a-mas-de-60-000-hogares-y-empresas/

[7] For example, see https://blog.somenergia.coop/som-energia/proceso-participativo-reflexion-estrategica-organisativa/

[8] Data taken from https://www.somenergia.coop/es/participa/#directorio Viewed 5 March 2018

and thus operate as a "spokesperson for and with the whole society" and (Riutort Isern in Wagenaar et al 2015). They also act as an intermediary between members and the governing council. Som Energia also engages its members in various working committees on specific renewable energy campaigns and projects, via discussion platform on the web, and through regular conferences.

Participation remains an important resource for building and maintaining Som Energia, particularly for attracting new members, and in fulfilling its advocacy work in policy reform and social change. Yet as membership numbers escalate, and as its commercial services evolve, engaging citizens actively in the cooperative has become more difficult. To address these challenges, in 2016 Som Energia embarked on a 10-month strategic reflection process with its members to collectively determine:[9] "what we are and how do we want to work?" In addition to reflecting on a range of commercial and policy issues, the cooperative also wanted its members to debate its future approach to citizen participation, particularly as the organisation grows. Some of the questions put on the table for debate included:[10] What role should citizens develop? What tools does the citizenry have to participate? How can we guarantee citizen participation? How should the opinions of the members be incorporated?

This strategic reflection process was a highly participatory process involving people from the local groups, the technical management team and Governing Council. It included three sessions with a central group of diverse members and technical staff, plus meetings at the local and central level. The reflective process cumulated in the General Assembly in May 2017.[11] What emerged from these reflective discussions was recognition that participation and the cooperative's democratic model was not only central to its success in supplying affordable clean energy, but also its success as an advocacy organisation and social movement:[12]

> The project's vision stands out as the achievement, the channeling of participation at the territorial level, and the spaces for participation, learning and growth. It has realised an identity and community feeling that has allowed us grow to where we are today…

The devolution of participation to the local level has been heralded as a particular achievement:[13]

> In relation to Local Groups, these have been seen as a space that has facilitated the participation of young people, generating an intergenerational diversity and also as a space to launch locally-initiated projects…

As part of this reflective process, citizens also identified areas of improvement and many felt that there were aspects of the cooperative's participatory approach that could be strengthened, for example by connecting local volunteers to central management, by better managing dominant members at the local level, and by increasing participation rates at the annual conferences and Assembly gatherings. The exclusion of some groups (particularly women and young people) was another issue that the members felt need to be improved on.[14] Here we see evidence of how citizens in citizen-led governance innovations are wrestling with many of the participatory challenges that plague scholars and practitioners of participatory and deliberative governance. However these

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[9] Blog post: 'Start of the participatory process of organisational and strategic reflection of the cooperative'.
https://blog.somenergia.coop/som-energia/proceso-participativo-reflexion-estrategica-organisativa/2016/10/inicio-del-proceso-participativo-de-reflexion-organisativa-y-estrategica-de-la-cooperativa/
[10] 'Objectives of the Participatory process.' Available at: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bRlH-xNQmgOM6fL8-FycBT31-_uS92njc_cotPRw5sc/edit Accessed 6 March 2018.
[11] ibid
[12] 'Synthesis of the workshop, September 2016 "Begin process of strategic and organisational reflection"
'https://docs.google.com/document/d/1aBKyh2Z16mWeIe7un804LYqomLQ6rwshQ2D_CPmGgj4/edit#
[13] ibid
[14] ibid

reflections are not from an expert participatory consultant skilled in democratic innovation, but from citizens themselves.

As a result of this reflection process Som Energia has sought to better articulate how it understands and practices citizen participation in the cooperative. In its new strategic framework (2017-2020) the cooperative specifically acknowledges that participation, reflection, and action are foundational activities necessary to balance its two core functions, namely: 1) its economic activities from the production and sale of energy services, and 2) its activism work in the public sphere and with those who legislate and govern institutions. There are already signs that Som Energia is seeking to strengthen the participatory experiences for its members. For example in May 2017, the General Assembly was held at the headquarters of Girona, while simultaneously also being held in 20 other cities all connected by videoconference. In total more than over 300 members participated. The Assembly was also covered live through the cooperative's blog, providing opportunities for members from different venues to contribute. Som Energia also instigated an electronic voting process where members were able to vote on the agenda prior to the Assembly. [15] Preliminary steps have also begun on energy inclusion.[16]

Overall Som Energia sheds light on how citizen-led governance innovations use participatory processes to not only develop and grow, but also to ensure that they can be sustained over time.

Case 3: citizens transforming justice services (Baltimore Community Conferencing)

Our third case illustrates how citizens can initiate flexible procedures for handling interpersonal conflicts that might otherwise be taken up as criminal offenses and adjudicated by the more formal criminal justice system. While lay people can, of course, be invited into legal systems as witnesses and jurors, what we discuss here are uninvited citizen-led governance innovations that take up tasks otherwise executed by court professionals. Called 'restorative justice' and 'community justice,' these initiatives have become increasingly common worldwide since the 1970s. They typically handle juvenile, misdemeanour, and other low-level offenses and result in restitution, apology, or some other form of recompense rather than a traditional penalty (Van Ness and Strong 2010).

In Baltimore, restorative justice programs emerged in a context where there was significant concern about both crime and criminal justice responses to crime (Abramson and Moore 2001). Residents of distressed neighbourhoods were deeply concerned with chronic problems like drug dealing, robberies, and violence, but they were equally concerned with the numbers of young people entering the juvenile justice system and ultimately, as adults, prison. The Baltimore Community Conferencing Center was established in 2000 as a citizen-led governance innovation to deal with both problems: to help people handle situations where state agents had failed (as when repeated calls to police did nothing to clear drug dealers from a park or stop teenagers from vandalizing cars) or where state agents would make a harmful situation worse (as when a student conflict at school

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[15] Blog Post 27 May 2017, 'We expected energy bill this year to 30 million euros and electric service to more than 60,000 homes and businesses' https://blog.somenergia.coop/comunicados-prensa/2017/05/ndp-som-energia-preveu-facturar-aquest-any-30-milions-deuros-i-donar-servei-delectricitat-a-mes-de-60-000-llars-i-empreses/
[16] In February 2018, it convened its first public conference on Women on Gender and Energy. See Blog Post '1st Meeting of Women on Gender and Energy'
https://blog.somenergia.coop/campanas/2017/12/os-invitamos-al-i-encuentro-de-mujeres-sobre-genero-y-energia/

leads to a young person developing a criminal record that makes it harder for him to obtain employment).[17]

Organisers of community conferences use a deceptively simple process. The first step is to gather together in one neutral place everyone affected by a harmful action. This may involve weeks of preparatory work going door to door notifying residents about a meeting and soliciting feedback on neighbourhood concerns. 'We've defined 'community' as the community of people who have been affected by and involved in the conflict or the crime. Everybody who's involved in or affected by the situation, and their respective supporters, is included.' Community conferences can be as big as needed to address a particular problem. 'We really widen the circle. Thus, conferences usually include between ten and forty people. Conferences are always about engaging the entire community of people affected by whatever's going on and giving them the power to try to fix it' (Dzur 2013).

Once people are gathered together in the meeting, conference organisers encourage each person, one at a time, to tell the group what happened. Then, again, another round of contributions as each participant tells the group how it affects them personally and how they feel about it. Finally, participants say what they want to do about the action to move forward. It is a simple process, but crucial normative choices are built into it. Especially important is the freedom to be passionate, sad, and even angry. Few limits are placed on emotions in a community conference because organisers believe that public expression of emotions brings them out in a safe space where they can be observed, felt, and become part of a collective practice: 'they can talk in whatever way they want. We don't go in saying, "You can't make racist comments," because if you do that then the person who is racist is never going to get a chance to change. We let the group decide. So once something offensive comes up, the facilitator will say to the participants: "There is a request to not say these kinds of things, is this something everyone can agree to?" It lets people be who they are and then lets that group decide for itself the norms for their behavior from this time forward' (Dzur 2013).

Organisers do not see the conferencing process as a pseudo-official agency for solving social problems *for* people. They are meant as a medium for citizens to handle their own problems in their own way. 'We need to look at what *structures* we offer people in our society to resolve conflict and crime, because they determine the outcomes. The fact that people in highly distressed neighborhoods can negotiate solutions within the structure provided by Community Conferencing only emphasizes the fact that we are all capable of safely and effectively resolving many of our own conflicts' (Dzur 2013). Conferencing provides a loose structure that recognizes and affirms citizen agency: 'we all have a larger capacity to resolve complicated conflicts and crimes than we are allowed to. But people also need to have an appropriate structure to do it' (Dzur 2013).

It is, in fact, a process that challenges conventional attitudes comfortable with hierarchical decision-making in criminal justice. As one organiser argues, 'if our institutions are top-down—if we need a judge in a black robe telling people how they should be punished—then we're going to get one set of outcomes. But if we engage people with this alternative structure—in a circle where they acknowledge what happened, share how they've been affected, and then decide how to make it better—then we will get a whole different set of outcomes' (Dzur 2013).

Though there are clear objectives to conferences, namely, to defuse interpersonal strife, ensure neighbourhood safety, and reduce future harms, these practical goals are impossible to detach from

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[17] For more on their early development, see http://www.communityconferencing.org/how-we-got-started/

the deep democratic process being that is being utilized and reinforced over time. Community Conferencing facilitators carry into every meeting a commitment to the following norms:

- 'Participation—inclusion;
- Equality—that everyone has an equal voice;
- Deliberation—that everything that is brought up is discussed and not swept under the rug;
- Nontyranny—no one is allowed to dominate the conversation.'[18]

These norms provide a framework for deliberation among community members of all ages. As important as the simplicity of the three dialogical stages of the conferencing process itself (1) say what happened; 2) say how it made you feel; 3) say what you can do to prevent it from happening in the future), these underlying democratic norms allow Baltimore Community Conferencing to be owned by citizens themselves and to be replicated over and over again.

While restorative justice practitioners, like those involved in Baltimore Community Conferencing, are often openly critical of state agencies reproducing what is widely seen as costly, dysfunctional, and biased mainstream criminal justice, they are also pragmatic about the need to collaborate with officials. They realize that to be successful, reforms must be done in connection to established institutions rather than against them (Dzur 2013):

> Restorative justice programs bring about reform from both the bottom up and the top down. In Baltimore, our juvenile courts are diverting felony and misdemeanor cases from their system to Community Conferencing. Could they refer more cases than they do? Absolutely. But for them to take a felony case and say, 'We think these people can resolve it better through Community Conferencing than through our system,' that's a significant change. And every year around 1,400 people in Baltimore participate in a Community Conference. Has it completely changed our criminal justice system? No. But when judges call us and ask us how they can use Community Conferencing more, I know that we are making progress.

Case 4: citizens creating electoral reform (Indi)

Our final case explores how citizens themselves can successfully instigate and create long term political reform. Rather than advocating or resisting from the outside, in these particular reform innovations citizens work collectively on making pragmatic changes to existing institutions. Although working within the confines of existing structures and rules, there is scope for citizens to exercise considerable agency in what institutions they engage with, and how they shape reform. In the following case we see how one particular community instigated and championed lasting political reforms by stepping into the formal system of electoral politics.

The context of this case is the conservative rural electorate of Indi in Victoria, Australia with a population of around 130,000. In the lead up to the 2013 Federal election many residents in Indi felt abandoned by the political system: the local member at the time (MP Sophie Mirabella) appeared unresponsive, the party system offered few choices and, in such a safe seat, the act of voting felt worthless (see Hendriks 2017).[19] This frustration with the status quo drove a group of about 20 local citizens to form a small community group, *Voices4Indi (V4I)*, to engage the electorate in political conversations about improving local democracy.

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[18] Interview with Lauren Abramson, founder of Baltimore Community Conferencing.
[19] There are many aspects to the changing political landscape in the electorate of Indi since 2012. For a fuller account of the citizen-led democratic innovation in Indi, see Hendriks (2017).

From its inception, V4I saw democratic reform in the electorate as a broader participatory renewal project. Many of V4I's explicit goals were participatory in orientation. For example, it sought to 'be a voice for the people of Indi' (p. 2) and to offer a 'new means for political action' by 'mobilis[ing] a voting public that is well informed and engaged, and develop[ing] political representation that is receptive and open to the broader community' (V4I 2013, 2-3). The founding members of V4I were also committed to listening to, and empowering, local people. Many had extensive experience in the community development sector, and knew the value of using participatory approaches to engage people in projects (see Hendriks 2017).

One influential participatory approach employed by V4I was Kitchen Table Conversations (KTC). Originally designed by Mary Crooks (VWT 2000, 2007), Kitchen Table Conversations involve a group of around 10 people meeting at a host's house to participate in a structured, facilitated, discussion, guided by a set of questions, with one participant scribing (Capper 2013). The initial set of conversations were structured around a series of starter questions, such as:
- what makes for a strong community?
- what concerns do you feel should be brought to the attention of your elected representatives?
- what do you think makes for a really good political representative?
- are there particular issues of concern that you feel strongly about?

Through these conversations, citizens in Indi opened up and started engaging on political issues and reimaging their democratic possibilities. Over a period of eight months, 53 structured, facilitated conversations (KTCs) were held across the 28000 square kilometre electorate (approximately the size of Massachusetts in the US). Overall, 425 people participated and their thoughts and opinions were recorded and collated into a report that was presented to their representative Sophie Mirabella (see V4I 2013).

Here, we see the participatory aspects of citizen-led governance innovations at work: V4I actively organised the community and sought input from everyday citizens. Rather than getting individual people to support the organisation's 'solution' to local democracy, for example via a petition, citizens in Indi are being asked to set the agenda of *Voices4Indi*. As one of the groups founding members Alana Johnson explains (cited in Capper 2013):

> The Kitchen Table Conversations created a vehicle or a place that was not only welcoming and safe, because it didn't matter what your party politics were, but you were there because your ideas were going to be valued.

The KTCs revealed much about how the local community viewed politics and possibilities for democratic reform in Indi (McGowan 2013b):

> People told us about the importance of community, and how belonging is the foundation, the building block, it is what makes our lives worthwhile. We heard about current issues impacting people lives...we learnt what people thought about political representation and what they thought was the role of representatives. We heard that people in Indi are interested in politics. ...The sense of disillusionment and dissatisfaction wasn't only among young people, it was wide spread through the electorate....There was fear of talking about politics, of being labelled, of being marginalized. We heard how political decisions have a direct impact on people's lives...We also heard something else: people didn't agree with the image that Indi is a conservative seat, that it is safe and that it is boring and couldn't change.

In response to community concerns about feeling disconnected from their elected representatives, a founding member of the *Voices4Indi* group decided to stand as an independent candidate to run against the incumbent Liberal member (for a full account, see Hendriks 2017). Here we see how Voices4Indi exercised agency in its reform agenda; it chose to work with particular institutions and processes (e.g. the electoral system) but *not* others (e.g. the party system).

To promote their Independent candidate for the 2013 election, the V4I group ran a community-driven campaign with many participatory aspects. They reached outwards in to the community and mobilise hundreds of volunteers. Their candidate campaign combined traditional on the ground community activities (bush-dances, singing circles, movie nights, protest rallies and so on) with sophisticated on-line activities (targeted use of social media, crowd-funding to source donations, and managing their campaign efforts using the US developed political software, Nationbuilder) (Klose and Haines 2013). One particularly successful way V4I encourage local people to engage in the campaign process, was to make participation social, fun and meaningful. For example, the local campaign offices were transformed into 'hubs' that became important sites of community activity where people would not just come to volunteer but to share creative works, food or thoughts on the campaign (Johnson, Interview 09.09.16).

Collectively these efforts to connect and mobilise the community behind an alternative candidate generated a broad grassroots support for political reform across the electorate. The 2013 V4I election was in the end an extensive community effort involving over 600 volunteers, 1000 donors and 5000 online supporters (Klose and Haines 2013). (Similar numbers were recorded for the 2016 election campaign, see Haines et al 2016). According to two members of the V4I group, this level of interest in democracy was unprecedented in the electorate (Klose and Haines 2013):

> Indi has never seen anything like this before. For the first time in living memory, thousands of people from all walks of life were engaging in politics and having a say in how they would like to see their electorate represented...While the rest of Australia switched off at this election, we switched on. We are now an engaged electorate. The people of Indi are claiming the power to be the architects and authors of our community's future. Whoever is elected as the Member for Indi will have a strong, engaged, opinionated community to answer to and that is a win for any democracy.

The participatory efforts of groups such as Voices4Indi also have flow-on effects. V4I has built civic capacity through a strong volunteer program and a series of national seminars. A few active volunteers in V4I have gone on to successfully stand for local elections, and are now elected members in local councils in the region (Hendriks 2016b). V4I has also inspired similar local grass-root movements, for example, Strathbogie Voices. This has come about due to the advocacy work of Voices4Indi; it has become a participatory champion and trainer for other communities by running workshops for other grassroots groups promoting democratic change (Chan 2014; McGowan 2015).

Overall the work of citizens in Indi represents more than sophisticated community organising; it is a story of how citizens are using participatory approaches to mediate between the official world of formal political institutions and local communities. In this case, the transformative impact of its participatory approach (e.g. the use of KTCs, and its participatory campaigns) on the functioning of mainstream democratic activities well exceeds what community organising and citizen activism traditionally achieves. What began as a small group of disgruntled voters talking together resulted in significant changes in local and national politics.

Table1: Overview of Four Cases of Citizen-Led Governance Innovations (CLGIs)

CASE	Initial citizen agency	Sustained citizen agency	Participatory practices	Participatory affinities with …	Insights for democratic innovation
1. Orange Sky Australia	Citizens acted to provide homeless people with dignity and community	Citizens *doing* social work	An extensive and growing volunteer program aimed at connecting homeless people to the community. Volunteers engage in conversations with homeless people while also offering them essential services (e.g. washing clothes, showers, screening films)	Volunteerism Community organising	Citizens' initiatives can grow and be replicated in other locations. They can also evolve into successful collective projects with state and private partners.
2. Som Energia	Citizens acted to produce and supply affordable renewable energy	citizens *generating* executive services and reform	Combination of central decision making and active participation of local members and the broader community. Mix of democratic procedures: voting, work committees, local participatory groups, and open conferences and training workshops.	Social cooperatives Civic enterprises	Citizens can self-govern essential services such as energy. Participatory mechanisms can also assist civic initiatives navigate tensions between their governance and advocacy roles.
3. Baltimore Community Conferencing	Citizens acted to improve criminal justice responses to low-level offenses	Citizens *enacting* judicial services and reform	Facilitated neighbourhood conferences to uncover sources of conflict and work out solutions through loosely structured dialogues.	Community organising Collaborative governance	Citizens can resolve and defuse low-level conflicts before they become juridified and enter formal justice systems
4. Indi	Citizens acted to build an effective relationship between the electorate and their elected representative	Citizens *creating* electoral reform	Convening regular Kitchen Table Conversations (KTC) on democratic reform, plus a participatory-community approach to election campaigning.	Community organising	Citizens can recraft their representative democratic institutions in ways that are participatory, open, and social.

IV. Citizen agency in citizen-led governance innovations (CLGIs)

An overview of the four cases is provided in Table 1. What our cases collectively demonstrate is that citizens themselves are repairing democracy in unexpectedly novel ways. In all four cases we see citizens empowered to work on collective problems. These are not angry citizens reacting and mobilising around specific crises, nor are they activists protesting as part of a social movement. Indeed, none of the actors we spoke with in our cases would identify themselves as social justice warriors or activists *per se*.

Instead the actors in our cases are perhaps more accurately described as 'citizen innovators' who take practical steps to self-govern a particular policy issue or reform agenda, whether that be cleaner energy, less biased and more effective justice outcomes or a more responsive electoral system. In striving for these goals, citizens in our cases adopt innovative organisational and participatory approaches that produce positive democratic outcomes.

In stark contrast to highly structured top-down democratic innovations (such as minipublics), the citizen innovators in our CLGIs cases generate democratic reform through *acting* collectively together to deliver better public goods and services (OSA, Som Energia) or to reform dysfunctional institutions (Indi, RJ). While mostly operating on the local level, the citizens in our cases are undertaking frontier policy work, for example in the legislative and electoral realm (Indi), in the executive (Som Energia), the justice system (RJ) and in the social sector (OSA).

In terms of democratic reform, these empowered groups of citizens develop and use innovative participatory practices in the process of *doing* governance. For example, they run reflective workshops, train volunteers, hold community events and forums, organise community conferences, and convene online discussion forums. Many of the procedures they develop are based on democratic ideals such as shared power, inclusion, deliberation, participation, equity, and voice. For example, in the case of OSA volunteers are encouraged to have open conversations with the homeless in ways that are non-threatening, positive and equitable. In Som Energia, the organisation enacts shared power by offering multiple opportunities for member engagement in central and local level decisions. In Baltimore we see a commitment to the deliberative norms of inclusion, equality, and voice. In Indi the citizens use participatory procedures to encourage inclusive community conversations based on the principles of openness and listening. While the central goal of citizens in CLGIs is to act in some practical way on a particular governance issue or reform agenda, their democratic norms are impossible to detach from the practical steps they take to govern themselves and engage with the broader public.

Across all cases we observe four common features of CLGIs that make them vehicles for effective citizen agency.

A. Simple replicable procedures: As discussed above, citizen innovators in our cases employ participatory processes, structures or models to engage with relevant publics. On the one hand, most of these participatory procedures offer a far more structured approach to citizen engagement than would be found in local community organising initiatives, which typically rely on non-institutional arrangements such as social and community networks (e.g Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). On the other hand, the participatory procedures in our cases are far less structured and rules based than those promoted by advocates of deliberative citizens' forums (e.g. Smith 2009; Fung 2003).

In our observations CLGIs develop simple yet concrete participatory processes that act as scaffolding around which citizens themselves can make necessary procedural adjustments to suit particular contexts. This simple and flexible approach to structuring public engagement empowers citizens to organise participatory processes on their own terms, without having to rely on participatory experts. Simple, flexible procedures not only enable citizen ownership and adaptability, they can be easily replicated by citizens elsewhere in other contexts and locations.

B. Congruous with existing systems: Citizen innovators in our cases undertake governance and reforms that involve engaging with existing institutions (e.g., social services, energy infrastructure, courts and police, elections). In all four cases, citizens are responding to the failure or limitations of conventional state institutions and civil society organisations to address public problems. Yet citizens in our cases do not reject these institutions and organisations, but instead appear willing to work with, alongside, and outside them to achieve their governance or reform goals. In other words, citizen innovators are doing governance in ways that are not in direct opposition to state officials, agencies, and departments and may in fact be in collaboration or coordination with them.[20]

While CLGIs have boundaries with (and objections to) particular aspects of the system—such as the courts, police departments, political parties, or large corporations—they are willing to work together, albeit on the terms established by citizens. Congruence allows CLGIs to work outside what we call the 'zone of cooptation' (see Figure 1 below) while also gaining access to system resources such as public funding, data and information, and formal legal authority. Thus CLGIs may be better positioned to sustain themselves over time than non-congruent actors and, if trusted and respected by state actors, may be better able to shift cultural attitudes and practices within the system incrementally.

C. Proactive: Citizen innovators in our cases take independent and proactive steps to deliver services or create reforms. They steer their reforms well in advance of being invited into the problem by state authorities. As with the 'everyday makers' discussed by Henrik Bang (2005), what needs to be done, by which person or group, with what resources, is defined not by ideal models of 'the citizen' as rights bearer, or voter, or deliberator, but by expectations established by citizens themselves dealing practically with the issues that confront them. Sometimes, in fact, citizens have to re-define how they are seen by officials who may not take them seriously; they may very well have to advocate to be heard, to have a place at a decision making table.

In some neglected areas of public policy, citizens are not just 'having a say,' they are engaged in delivering goods and services collectively. Indeed, we see how some citizens take policy reform entirely into their own hands: such as, in Som Energia where citizens are collectively generating and supplying renewable energy. CLGIs appear in areas where the state has completely ignored, or tried and failed to deliver needed goods and services. What we see, however, differs from the picture drawn by critics of neoliberalism who pose state actors as the active parties, offloading problems onto an ill-equipped and somewhat hapless civil society. Rather, we find CLGIs proactively occupying a shared space because some combination of collaboration, shared resources, and expert and local knowledge is required to secure an objective — such as clean air, education, justice, health and wellness, or social order — that has never been adequately performed or delivered by the state.

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[20] Citizens involved in CLGIs would find them less appealing if they were part of the system or if they were completely detached from it. Success for CLGIs, in other words, is not absorption into a department or institution, nor is it being autonomous from the system. Their hybrid or liminal nature seems essential to their identity and practice.

D. Pragmatic: CLGIs are action-oriented and conducive to the exercise, growth, and transmission of practical reason. Citizen innovators pursue reform outcomes that are practical and meaningful, sometimes even leading to significant and long-term change. Their problem-solving identity may help them sustain themselves over time: citizens involved see tangible changes as a result of their participation and system actors recognize them as assets in tackling difficult issues.

CLGIs also encourage the sharing of experiences and feelings that may not 'fit' a more rigidly structured deliberative process, helping to generate practical knowledge and enabling citizens to adapt their problem solving abilities to the tasks at hand. They create and transmit practical knowledge as they interact with homeless people, create energy, and resolve conflicts. CLGIs are learning sites that are more free-wheeling than mini-publics but more formally structured than community organising. They may be able to generate a kind of local practical knowledge better adapted to solving long-term difficult policy problems.

V. Mapping pathways of democratic innovation

We turn now to consider how CLGIs differ from other forms of democratic innovation and related civic work such as activism, community organising, and volunteerism. According to Elstub and Escobar (2017), what democratic innovations share in common is that they 'all reimagine the role of citizens in governance processes, and thus renegotiate the relationship between government and civil society.' In our cases, citizens are renegotiating civil society relationships with the state through *action*. In other words, they are enacting innovative participatory practices and projects in order to adapt conventional systems of governance and democratic decision making. This is not to say our agents are uncritical of government agencies, of course. But we find they are judging, deciding, creating, on their terms, and in ways that connect to the ongoing operations of government agencies and existing institutions, such as courts and electoral processes. To borrow from Habermas (1985), the kind of citizen agency we are observe in CLGIs is a kind of reverse colonization of system institutions by patterns and practices firmly rooted in the lifeworld.

The particular kind of productive agency we find in our cases is, we contend, distinct from democratic innovation via invited participatory forums, on the one hand, and from other forms of civic participation, such as community organising, activism, and volunteer work, on the other.

In the Figure 1, we map CLGIs along two axes: structure and agency. While there are a number of other aspects of CLGIs that are worth exploring and which distinguish them from other kinds of citizen participation, these strike us as the most salient to the issues concerning us in this paper. The vertical axis represents the degree of structure imposed on the participants—the deliberation in a minipublic forum such as a citizens' jury, for example, is more tightly structured than the work carried out by a neighborhood watch participant. The horizontal axis represents the degree of agency citizens hold relative to those state officials, agencies, and institutions we call 'the system'. When agency is highly dependent, citizens are trapped in a 'zone of cooptation' in which they have little problem-solving power or authority. When agency is more independent, citizens take up activist roles operating against system actors. In the middle, which we might well call a 'zone of congruence', citizens are taking up more collaborative roles working with system actors.
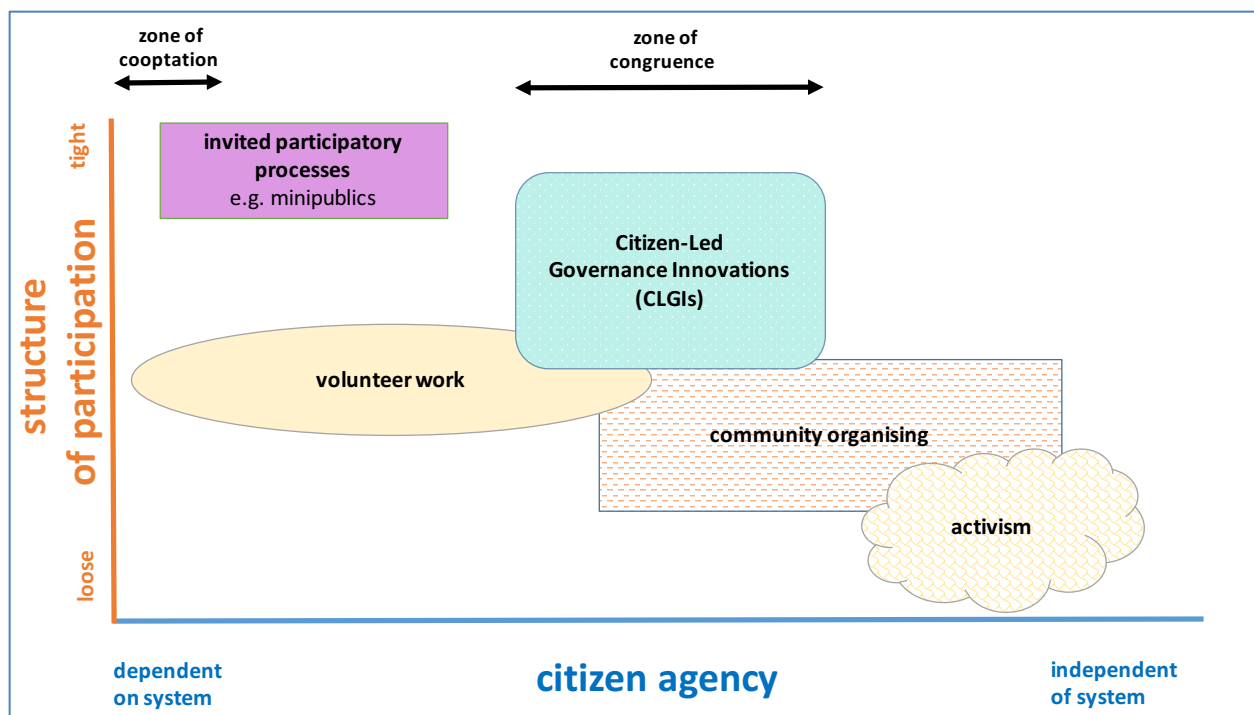
Figure 1: Map of different pathways to democratic reform (in terms of structure & agency)

In contrast to invited and highly structured participatory forums, citizen innovators have considerably greater freedom to set their own agendas, define the terms of their deliberations, and determine what actions to take. Unlike minipublics, which are frequently oriented around discussing possible policy options to be taken up by system actors, members of CLGIs are often both deliberators and actors—putting into motion what is discussed. They do more than monitor, critique, and discuss the work of system actors; they take up and execute governance tasks.[21]

Like volunteers, citizen innovators are generally involved in civic engagement projects because of their interest in concrete, often local level change. However, volunteers tend to be neither activist nor innovative; they normally accept the 'rules of the game' and take up the tasks or responsibilities that are assigned to them by authorities. Studies of citizen volunteers in local council committees find that while these volunteers may have considerable devolved responsibility for managerial tasks, they actually have very limited influence over local democracy (See Hendriks et al. 2013). Volunteers and engaged citizens are not locked into their roles, of course, and can, in fact, become activists and innovators through working in more critical and creative ways, but they would then be expressing a different kind of agency.

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[21] We recognize that in some structured participatory forums ordinary citizens are empowered to create change through their deliberations on real-world policy problems. In the early 2000s scholars studied a number of such cases, under the banner of 'Empowered Participatory Governance' (EPG) (Fung and Wright 2003). While the cases discussed in this paper share some affinities with experiments in EPG, we contend that citizens in CLGIs typically exercise more independent agency. Moreover, as demonstrated in our cases, citizens in CLGIs not only instigate participatory governing, but they work to ensure that participation is sustained over time – a noted limitation of EPG experiments (see Abers 2003; Krantz 2003).

The agency of citizen innovators also differs from community organising. Unlike volunteers, those involved in community organising may not necessarily accept the authorities' 'rules of the game' and may seek, strategically, to extract resources from state officials and agencies in order to carry out local projects. Nevertheless, community organisers do not otherwise expand the governance capacity of ordinary citizens because they do not challenge the authority of public policy makers and administrators over tasks that could be accomplished by citizens — as when, for example, court professionals and police position themselves as the authoritative sources of justice and community safety. Organising citizens to clean a park, to raise money for a playground, or to make sure elderly neighbors have water and electricity after a storm are important, but do little to legitimate citizen agency with respect to governance tasks such as justice, community safety, and energy creation and distribution. In our cases citizens have broader aspirations for their role in policy making and delivering— as well as aspirations to connect to a broader public. The citizen agents involved in CLGIs are not just interested in making their own locales better, but want to share tools and processes that work so other citizens can establish their own problem-solving efforts.

Like activists, citizen innovators seek social and political change and are concerned with the ways public institutions operate. However, we can distinguish activism that aims to get institutions to make different decisions from CLGI efforts that either aim to reshape institutional practices to encourage greater citizen agency or simply take up the tasks that institutions are currently doing inadequately. While activists pressure courts to be more aware of racial bias in sentencing and police to be more sensitive to concrete community needs, for example, innovators pressure courts to allow juries sentencing authority (Dzur 2012) or, as in the case of Baltimore Community Conferencing, to take up the tasks of harm-reduction and conflict defusing themselves. Activists pressure office holders for specific policy outcomes, whereas innovators concentrate on agency-expanding procedural reforms, or on policy changes in which citizens have an ongoing active role.

VI. Conclusion

In this paper we have taken seriously criticisms of innovative citizens' forums: that they are often piecemeal and tokenistic, and can disempower and coopt citizens by serving the state and corporate interests (Lee, McQuarrie, and Walker 2015). In response we suggest that the field of democratic innovation expand its focus beyond questions such as 'How do we design stand-alone deliberative democratic forums?', and move towards questions such as 'What can we learn from citizen-led approaches to encourage more substantive and sustainable forms of democratic innovation?'

Our study of four citizen-led governance innovations sheds light on the particular kinds of agency that citizens exercise in productive and sustained democratic reform efforts. We demonstrate how some citizens are creating democratic pathways to their own policy and reform endeavors. These citizen innovators are not waiting to be invited into government, or agitating from the sidelines. Instead they are taking proactive and pragmatic steps to address policy failures or dysfunctional institutions. In governing these reforms, citizens self-organise and adopt replicable procedures for engaging their communities in collective reforms. Along with their commitments to inclusion, voice, and equality, the simplicity of their participatory practices fosters citizen buy-in and ownership. Procedural simplicity also aids practical reasoning—allowing flexibility, openness to divergent views, and the transmission of knowledge. Via CLGIs, the practical knowledge generated in community engagement can become part of a gradual social learning process over time as citizens learn 'what works' to create energy, defuse conflicts, and assist marginalized neighbors.

Our exploration of citizen-led governance reforms has implications for current debates on democratic innovation and deliberative democracy more broadly. For democratic innovators, our study drives home that democratic reforms can involve considerable citizen agency, and indeed they can be instigated and steered by citizens themselves. Our empirical cases demonstrate that there is productive zone of citizen agency somewhere between the often limited dependent agency in instances of one-off invited participatory forums, and the independent agency of citizens in activism. We show that citizens are not just productively reshaping practices within systems of governance, but also within conventional institutions of representative democracy, such as constituency relations and elections. What makes these citizen-led innovations not just productive, but also popularly appealing and sustained, is that citizens are empowered to employ simple and replicable procedures, to work both inside and outside existing institutions, and to be proactive and pragmatic about governance reforms.

For scholars and advocates of deliberative democracy, our paper sheds light on a group of hybrid citizen-governance entities that have yet to be fully considered in existing conceptualisations of deliberative democracy. When viewed from an early Habermasian (1985) perspective, citizen-led governance innovations are neither fully in the lifeworld or in the system but operate in a liminal zone between. From a deliberative systems perspective, CLGIs are neither in the 'empowered space' of state institutions or legislatures, nor are they fully embedded in the public sphere (Dryzek 2009). Theoretically, the citizen-led reforms discussed in this paper appear to be in a kind of conceptual no-man's-land. Some may render this conceptual homelessness problematic because it suggests that CLGIs potentially lack both the formal authority of organisations within 'the system' and the communicative power and freedom of groups in the public sphere. However, we contend that these collectives of citizens doing governance together appear to display the kind of nimble institutional flexibility required to address complex contemporary policy problems (Wagenaar 2007). In future research we aim to explore the broader implications of CLGIs for democratic theory and practice.

Finally, the empirical cases explored in this paper speak to a set of challenges facing those of us in the deliberative democratic movement as well as many others concerned with the trajectory of contemporary representative democracy. In particular, they help us better understand what, if anything, citizen innovators are doing to address counter-democratic economic and neoliberal pressures, to resist elite cooptation, to connect constructively with the politically marginalized, to shore up faltering public institutions. Our research finds that many citizens are creating different pathways to generate creative and productive democratic reforms.

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