

Results of the Academic Citizens' Assembly - K3 Kongress 2022

This report summarizes the process, results, and insights of the Academic Citizens' Assembly held at the K3 Kongress zu Klimakommunikation 2022 in Zurich on Wednesday 14.09.2022: academiccitizensassembly.ch

The Academic Citizens' Assembly

**21st century democratic
decision-making for the
Swiss societal transition.**

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A draft of this report was sent on 09.10.2022 to all participants for comments and suggestions, which were integrated in the final report. Thanks to all participants who contributed.

1. Context and goals

The **Academic Citizens' Assembly – K3 Kongress** ([ACA K3 2022](#)) took place on Wednesday 14.09.2022 at the K3 Kongress zu Klimakommunikation 2022 in Zurich, on the topic of “How to make sufficiency central to the national climate strategy?”, with two distinct goals:

- Identify climate action proposals around sufficiency supported by a supermajority (>85%) of participants, who were all reasonably well informed about both the climate crisis and climate action
- Familiarize leading climate communication professionals with a promising approach to engage the broad public for climate action

Since the 1980s, citizens' assemblies have been successfully conducted dozens of times in many countries, almost always leading to recommendations of high quality. Most assemblies had between 20 and 150 participants, and the main challenge was acting on the result by the government, parliament, or popular referendum. To overcome this issue, the [Academic Citizens' Assembly](#) (ACA) is specifically designed to scale to hundreds of thousands of participants, building on the Swiss tradition of participatory direct democracy.

ACA is entirely based on academic principles: evidence-based, lobby-free, no ideology. In contrast to many assemblies, interest groups do not get a special platform to defend their “interests” during the preparation phase, which is limited to science-based information.

Citizens' assemblies ensure representativity by a process called “stratified sortition”, where participants are randomly selected to maintain a representative proportion of all subgroups considered significant, such as age, gender, education, and sometimes nationality, income, size of city, political views or other. In contrast, the ACA is designed to be representative by full inclusion. ACA K3 2022 was not representative of the broader society, as participants were self-selected from participants to K3 Kongress zu Klimakommunikation.

The main partners of the Academic Citizens' Assembly are [EPFL](#) and [Business School Lausanne](#) (BSL), supported by [CLIMACT](#) and [E4S](#).

2. Structure, process, and tools

ACA K3 2022 was a one-session, 2-hour mini-assembly, in a 100-seat auditorium at the Toni-Areal Zurich, a former milk factory, today the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) and the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). The group deliberation and proposal writing was in fixed groups, voting was individual and anonymous. Each group was seated in a corner of the auditorium. The assembly took place on Wednesday 14.09.2022, 16:15-18:15, of which the last 30 min extended beyond the official end of the conference schedule, as it was the last workshop of the day.

Each group had a volunteer facilitator (to ensure respect, focused participation, and timely output) and observer (to note each group's social dynamic). Both facilitators and observers could participate in the deliberation and vote, in addition to their roles.

ACA K3 2022 was somewhat unusual as it compressed the learning phase of the assembly into a quick introduction of about 15 min at the beginning of the session. This choice was justified by the context within the K3 Kongress zu Klimakommunikation, with a professional audience well informed about the topic, and the very limited time we had for the single session.

Most of the time, around 85 min, was spent deliberating and writing proposals, with the vote taking the last 15 min.

Access to all needed tools (opening form, team documents, proposal voting software - pol.is, and the closing survey) was provided in a “Tools” section on the [ACA K3 2022 page](#) of the ACA website. It could be accessed on any device including mobile phones, but laptops were generally used for typing proposals and observer notes.

3. Participation - surveys, statistics, observers

ACA K3 2022 had a total of **21 participants in 3 groups**, 7 per group.

A total of **29 proposals** were submitted, **672 votes** cast.

The **Participant Survey**, 43% response rate, indicated participant composition and satisfaction and feedback to the assembly. The relatively low response rate was probably due to the survey timing, late in the day.

Participants were 57% female, 43% male; 44% communication professionals, 22% scientists, with others being consultants, students, or concerned citizens. 44% worked in Switzerland, 22% in Germany, 22% in Austria, and 11% in Liechtenstein.

Inclusion and respect were very high: (range (lowest to highest vote) 0-10, "mode" is most common reply

- Overall organization: average 6.4, with 33% voting "6" and 22% voting "8"
- "Was the goal of the ACA clear to you?": average 6.4, mode 7
- "Was the process of the ACA clear to you?", average 6.4, mode 6
- "Did the voting work well?", range 6-10, average 8.2, mode 9
- "Could you express yourself, and were you heard?", average 8.0, mode 9
- "Were you treated with respect?", average 9.0, mode 10
- "Quality of discussion?", average 7.6, mode 8
- "Quality of proposals?", average 6.8, mode 7
- Most people reported feeling energized, great experience, excited, interested
- Several people though more time would have been beneficial
- Group size (7 people) was generally considered good; for a short assembly, 5-6 might be better

An analysis of all 3 **observers' sheets** (3 groups, 1 session, total 3 sessions) indicates good quality of discussions:

- The atmosphere was relaxed 0%, mixed 100%, tense 0%
- Soft power prevailed 100% (100% rather, 0% clearly), hard power did not prevail at all
- Symmetry of the discussions during the session (participants treated each other as equals): 100% (67% very symmetric, 33% symmetric)
- Participants were not open to change positions 67% of the time (never or generally), only 33% were open
 - Noteworthy comment: "no position changes observed, rather change subject"
- Participants provided justifications for their claims: mostly 100%
- Reciprocity (referring to others' positions): medium 67%, high 33%
- Active participation: 90, similar for male and female participants
- Facilitators provided active facilitation 33% of the time
- Polarization occurred about 67% of the time, evenly split between 2 and 3 polarized sub-groups

4. Voting results: accepted proposals

Top proposals reaching >85% support, translated from German and slightly edited for clarity:

Focus: Transport+Urban Planning-Agriculture+Food-Buildings-Degrowth

100%

1. Modular architecture and forms of living - "breathing" apartments, with the aim of reducing m² per person

95%

2. CO₂ tax on fuels, make transport more expensive, abolish subsidies on fossil fuels
3. Change the use of car infrastructure for pedestrians and bicycles, give pedestrians and bicycles priority
4. Basic needs: vegan dishes as standard in public canteens at the lowest price
5. Create incentives: reverse commuter allowance for short distances, holidays nearby
6. Create incentives: differentiated taxation for communal living space

90%

7. Support multi-generational housing projects financially and politically, build/modernize energy-efficiently
8. Make parking more expensive
9. Strengthen communities, promote sharing models
10. Cap subsidies for insufficiency (e.g. single-family house) or make conditional (energy efficiency, etc.)

85%

11. Progressive taxation of living space per person above a certain size
12. Reduce working hours to increase self-sufficiency and reduce consumption

5. Discussion - insights and learnings

What can we conclude about the effectiveness of the ACA K3 2022?

Based on this analysis, especially clarity of goals and process, inclusion and respect, as well as multiple quality-of-discussion observers' indicators, the pertinence of proposals, and the functioning of a complex tool setup, with limited time and a small team, we conclude that the proposed process and voting tools worked well.

Initially, there was some confusion about the purpose: a demonstration or actual assembly designed to produce recommendations. Indeed it was intended to be both, and given the quality of proposals and limitation of time, this was reasonably well accomplished.

There was also some confusion about the focus of proposals: broad policy goals or specific measures, or even how to ensure such measures are integrated in actual national climate policy. The focus should be better defined in future assemblies. To make the assembly as useful as possible, the focus should be on specific measures: reasonable people will not disagree that transport emissions need to fall over 90%, but might well disagree how to get there; these challenging decisions are precisely the area where past citizens' assemblies have produced broad convergence towards meaningful proposals.

Finally, the topic of sufficiency is new in climate policy and public discourse, and for this reason, should have been better defined and perhaps narrowed to one sector (such as buildings or mobility), given the time constraints.

Overall, the level of engagement and energy in the room was very high, until the end of a long day, most participants having a feeling of accomplishment and motivation to support this democratic process, as captured in the participant survey, feedback emails, and numerous discussions.

How well did the ACA K3 2022 reach its first objective, to identify climate action proposals around sufficiency supported by a supermajority (>85%) of participants? The quality of the 12 top proposals, supported by 85% to 100% of participants, is such that they would represent a **significant improvement to the current climate policy** in any of the four countries represented. While these measures would not alone reach net zero, they could be a very meaningful first step which could be implemented immediately, given the supermajority support.

Are these insights applicable outside the climate-informed circles present at the K3 Kongress? Experience in past assemblies shows that randomly selected citizens, given adequate preparation and sufficient time for deliberation, reach the same quality of reasoning as experts, with the added major benefits of bringing multiple perspectives to the table and providing democratic legitimacy. This suggests that **similar proposals could be reached in a fully inclusive universal assembly, given adequate preparation**, which would certainly need to be much more extensive than in this expert group.

6. Next steps

To build on the momentum and learnings of the ACA K3 2022, we propose the following next steps:

- Share this report with participants, academia, public administrations, journalists, social media
- Outreach to cities, communes, cantons to adapt a future assembly to their context and language
- Integration in scientific research as a way to better engage citizens
- Include a similar workshop in the 2024 K3 Kongress zu Klimakommunikation in Graz, 18-19.09.2024
- Exchange experience with other deliberative democracy initiatives

7. Supplementary material

All statements and detailed results of all votes are available in the [Annex](#).
Please [contact us](#) for any additional information or exchange.