Ten recommendations for Swiss climate policy

6-8 minutes

The Academic Citizens' Assembly (ACA) is a model of a citizens' assembly built on academic principles (evidence-based, lobby-free, no ideology), open to the whole society and, using a novel process and tools, scalable to potentially include millions of participants. This deliberative and participative approach builds on the Swiss tradition of direct democracy and aims to bridge the gap between high-quality deliberation and decision-making of past citizens' assemblies, and the legitimacy of direct democracy.

The first prototype, online in June 2021, used a manual proposal sharing and voting process. The second ACA in April 2022 deployed the fully scalable process and tools for the first time. The results are detailed on the ACA 2022 webpage and in the ACA 2022 report.

ACA 2022 was an ambitious undertaking, with a total of 216 proposals submitted, and 11'971 votes cast.

Interview with Sascha Nick, initiator of the Academic Citizens' Assembly

On 2 April, the Academic Citizens' Assembly 2022 took place in Lausanne. Can you give us a quick overview of the day?

Saturday morning, around 70 participants and several members of the organising team met at EPFL's suitably named "CO2" auditorium for a one-day assembly on the topic "Climate action, the way forward: Building a societal consensus for 1.5°C". Most people prepared for the assembly by attending a preparatory online workshop, and reading the four-page Introduction to Climate Action. In a short plenary session, we explained the process and formed groups of eight-nine people. Each group appointed a facilitator as well as an observer and moved to a smaller breakout room. Groups deliberated in three 90-min sessions and entered their proposals on an online platform, and in the last 15 minutes of each session, voted individually on proposals from all groups.

The process was designed to converge, with each session building on the highest-voted proposals of the previous session. Between sessions there were coffee breaks and lunch in EPFL's restaurant «

L'Esplanade », an opportunity to relax during the otherwise very busy day.

What were the ideas that you found innovative and with a high potential impact on climate change?

The voting after each of the three sessions produced a list of 10 highest-voted proposals (from over 70 entered); additionally, a final quadratic voting gave participants the chance to express how strongly they supported the top proposals. The complete output of 40 proposals is on page 4 of the [ACA 2022 report](#); here I'd like to share a few I consider the most innovative.

These recommendations would significantly increase the effectiveness of Swiss climate policy, by restricting high emitters like car use, oil and gas heating, or eating meat, but also by better engaging citizens. Here is my selection from the full list:

Transport+Urban Planning

1. Concept of 15' city: everything is reachable within 15 minutes. Encourage sustainable urban planning: services, living & work are concentrated.

2. Encourage biking/walking by replacing car lanes with bike/pedestrian spaces and trees. Improve bike culture/skills /behaviors.

3. Reallocate climate-harmful transport subsidies towards clean and affordable transportation.

Agriculture+Food

4. Adapt food-type consumption to anticipated future conditions: less meat, select climate-resistant crops.

5. Link subsides to good farming practices (biodiversity and carbon footprint). Carbon tax on imported food.

6. Reduce meat consumption in schools by introducing progressively more vegan options, until 100% vegan, bio, regional, seasonal.

Education+Engagement

7. Every Swiss resident (CH, permit B, C) participates in a Citizens Assembly organized by municipality (1 day off/year)

8. A quota in mainstream media (some minutes per day, advertising space) to raise awareness on climate change and solutions

9. Promote culture and arts to change paradigm from consumption society to sustainable one; different media (movie, books, theater)

Buildings

10. Replace housing heating in Switzerland within 5 years.

How was the group dynamic? What feedback did you get from participants?

Each group and each session (total 24) were documented by an observer. Additionally, two surveys captured a lot of highly specific feedback, giving us a good idea of group dynamics; the analysis is in the report.

In the closing survey, participants indicated very high inclusion (87%) and respect (98%). They felt goals and the process were reasonably clear (each ca. 66%), and overall organization good (72%).

The observer's sheets indicate an overall very high quality of interaction, using metrics such as the prevalence of soft power (96%), relaxed atmosphere (63%), people treating each other as equals 80%, and openness of participants to change position (96%).

Most participants provided some level of feedback, and several sent us very detailed messages. Overall, most people enjoyed and appreciated the experience, quite a few were enthusiastic, many felt energized, some were impressed by the quality of recommendations, several were frustrated by the felt "messiness" of the democratic process, and many would have liked to have more time. A large number of specific suggestions for future assemblies was also provided, summarized in the [ACA 2022 report](#).

What are the next steps?

Communicate, share our experience, and identify cities and their pressing issues suitable for the ACA 2023.

The next assembly will be a mini-ACA during the [K3 Kongress zu Klimakommunikation](#) on 14.09.2022 in Zurich: [WS II/4: "Academic Citizens' Assembly zum Ausprobieren](#)".

We also plan to include assemblies in future "living labs" especially related to the transition to net zero, in interdisciplinary scientific projects.

Let us know if you are interested in exchanging or collaborating with the Academic Citizens' Assembly: sascha.nick@epfl.ch

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About the expert:

[Sascha Nick](#) is a researcher in societal transitions at the Laboratory of Environmental and Urban Economics at the EPFL.