

Citizen involvement through energy citizenship, mini publics, and beyond: Concepts, methods, and Finnish case studies

Antti Silvast, Associate Professor
LUT University, Social Sciences

Contents of the talk

1. Key ideas:

- Social acceptance & opposition
- Public participation
- Energy citizenship
- Energy democracy

2. Finnish case studies

- How do various publics relate to energy issues in Finland? Evidence from studies

3. Methods & future directions

- Advancing participation methods: why mini publics and deliberation, what beyond them?
- Material Democracy project, the Material Democracy hub



LUT Research group on Technology, Sustainability and Societal Change (TSSC)

- Group members:
 - **Antti Silvast** (group leader)
 - **Lotta Hautamäki** (postdoc)
 - **Enerelt Enkhtuya** (junior researcher)
 - **Paavo Tertsunen** (junior researcher)
 - **Ivan Ojeda** (junior researcher)
 - **Veera Kataja** (research assistant)
- Part of the growing LUT University Social Sciences Department
- Co-responsible for the LUT international MSc programme "Technology, Environment, and Societal Change"



15.12.2025

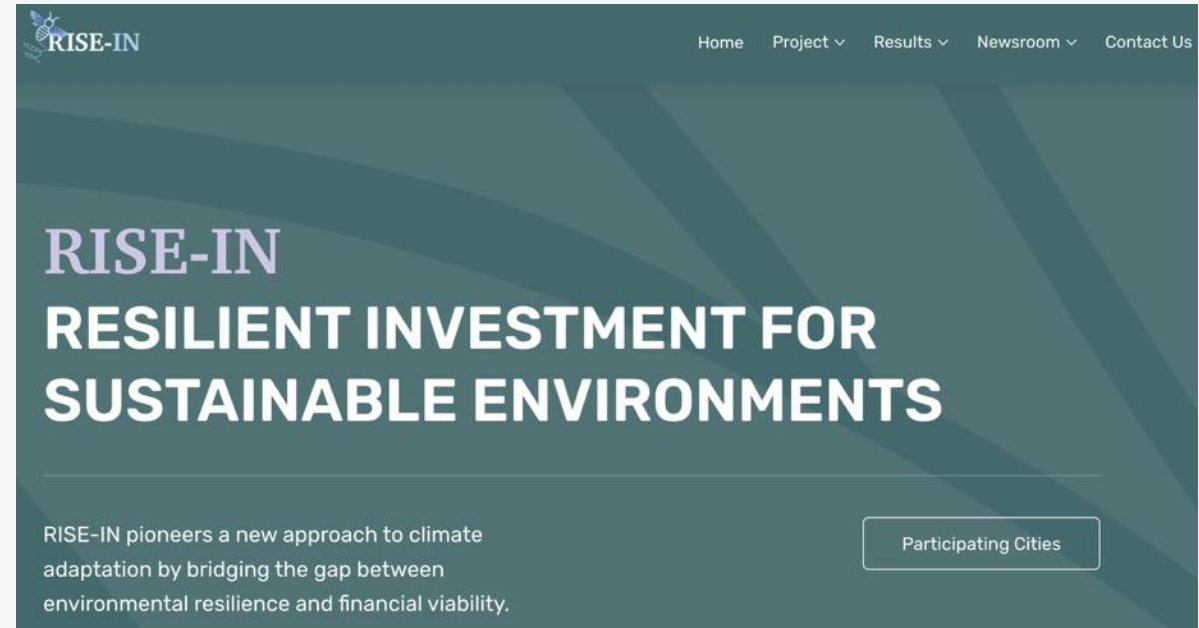


Material Democracy: Reducing polarization via material participation

Material Democracy strengthens societal participation to promote sustainability transitions.

- [About Material Democracy](#)
- [News](#)
- [Material Democracy Hub](#)

<https://materialdemocracy.fi/en>

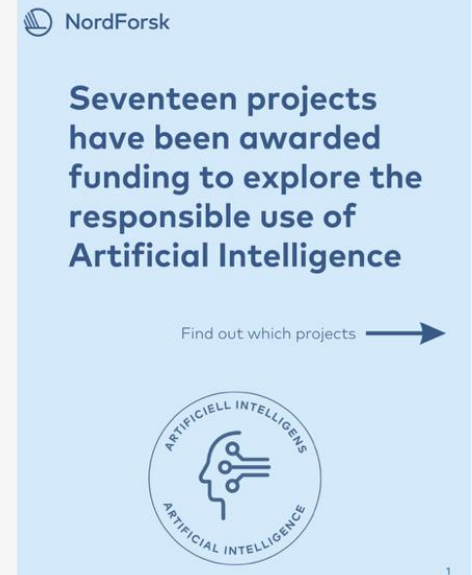


RISE-IN
RESILIENT INVESTMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTS

RISE-IN pioneers a new approach to climate adaptation by bridging the gap between environmental resilience and financial viability.

[Participating Cities](#)

<https://www.rise-in.eu/>



NordForsk

Seventeen projects have been awarded funding to explore the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence

[Find out which projects](#)

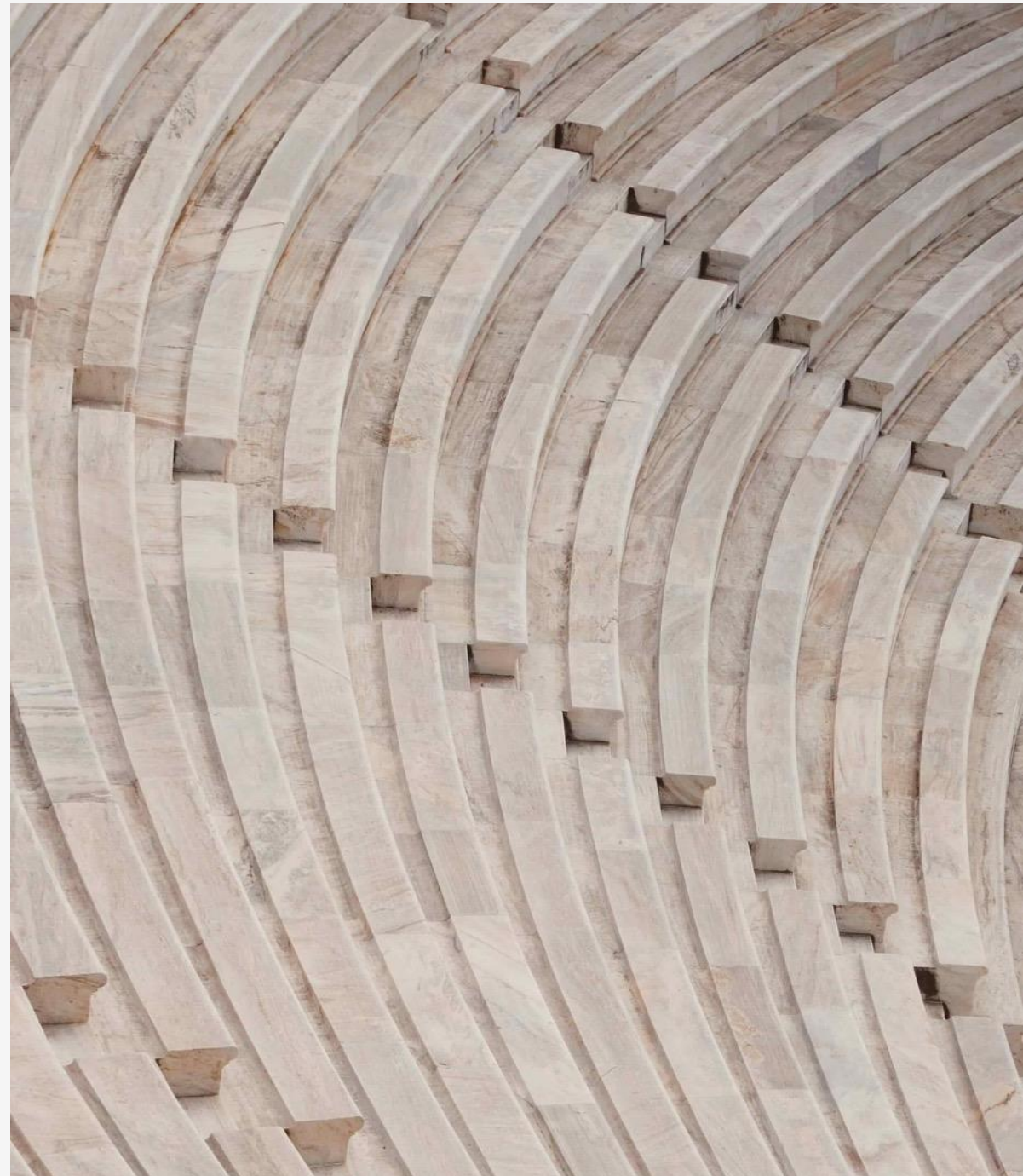
ARTIFICIELL INTELLIGENS
ARTIFICIELL INTELLIGENCE

Funding news 2.12.2025:
DARES - Data Quality for Responsible AI in Energy Systems (PI: University of Copenhagen)

What is our research interest?

1. General empirical interest in **how things work** in practice and materially
2. Develop this pragmatic agenda on **democracy, participation, resilience, justice**, and related topics
3. Extend the idea of democracy and the methods of participation to **people not involved in public issues**

15.12.2025



First: what are acceptance & opposition?

Three usual dimensions of **social acceptance**:

1. Socio-political – refers to policymaking and public perceptions
2. Community acceptance – refers to social trust, procedural and distributional justice
3. Market acceptance – refers to consumers, investors, and firms

35: Social acceptance

Mariana Galvão Lyra 

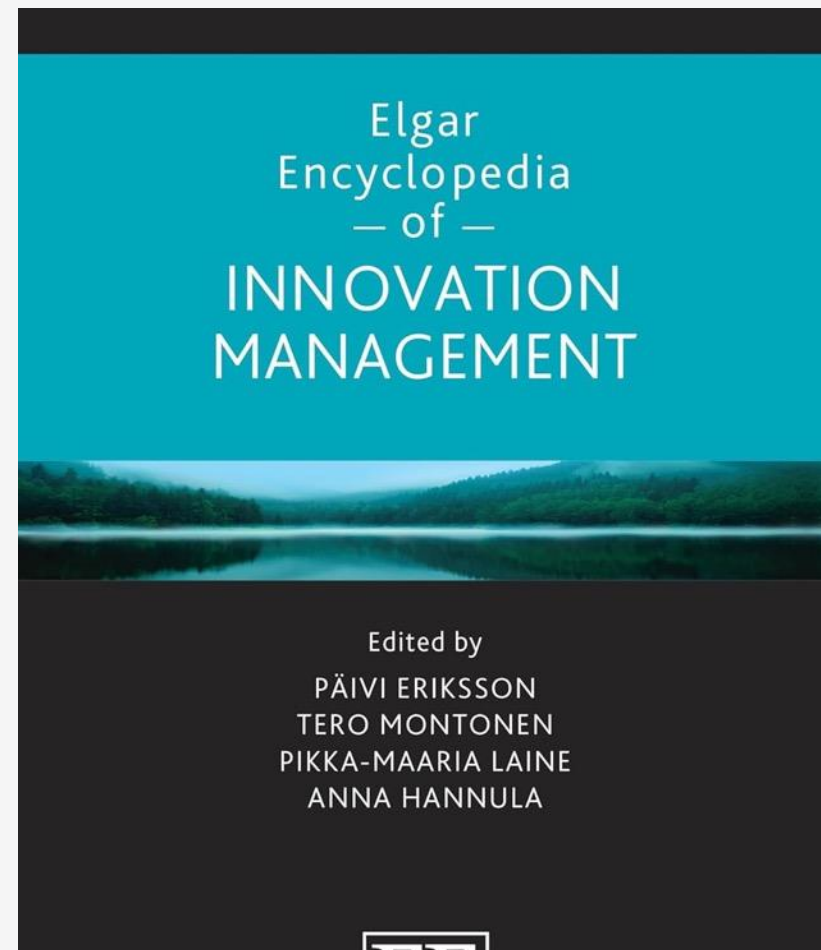
Category: Chapter

Collection: [Business 2025](#)

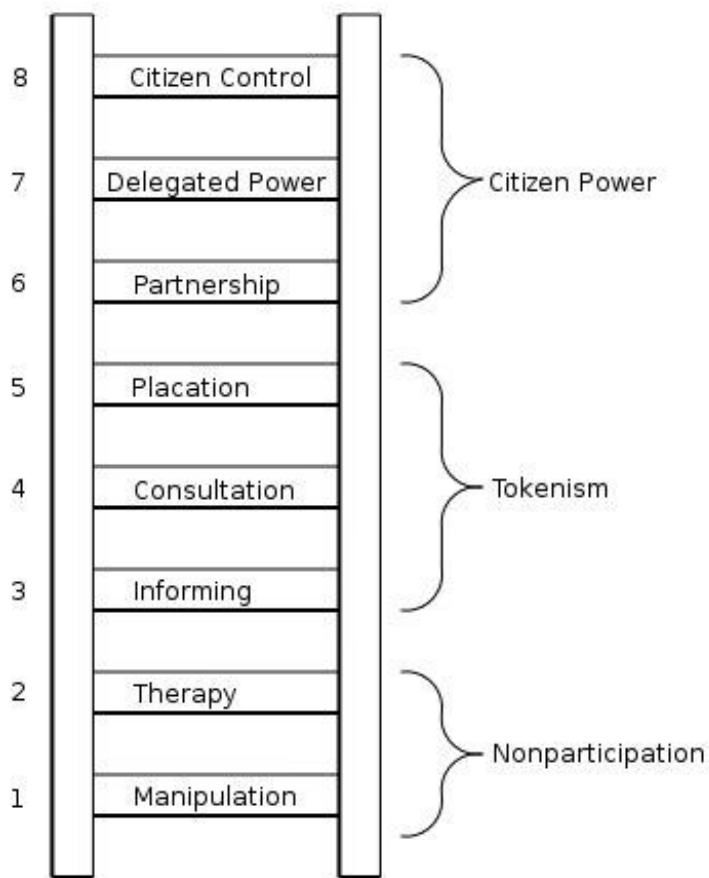
Published: 30 May 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035306459.00043>

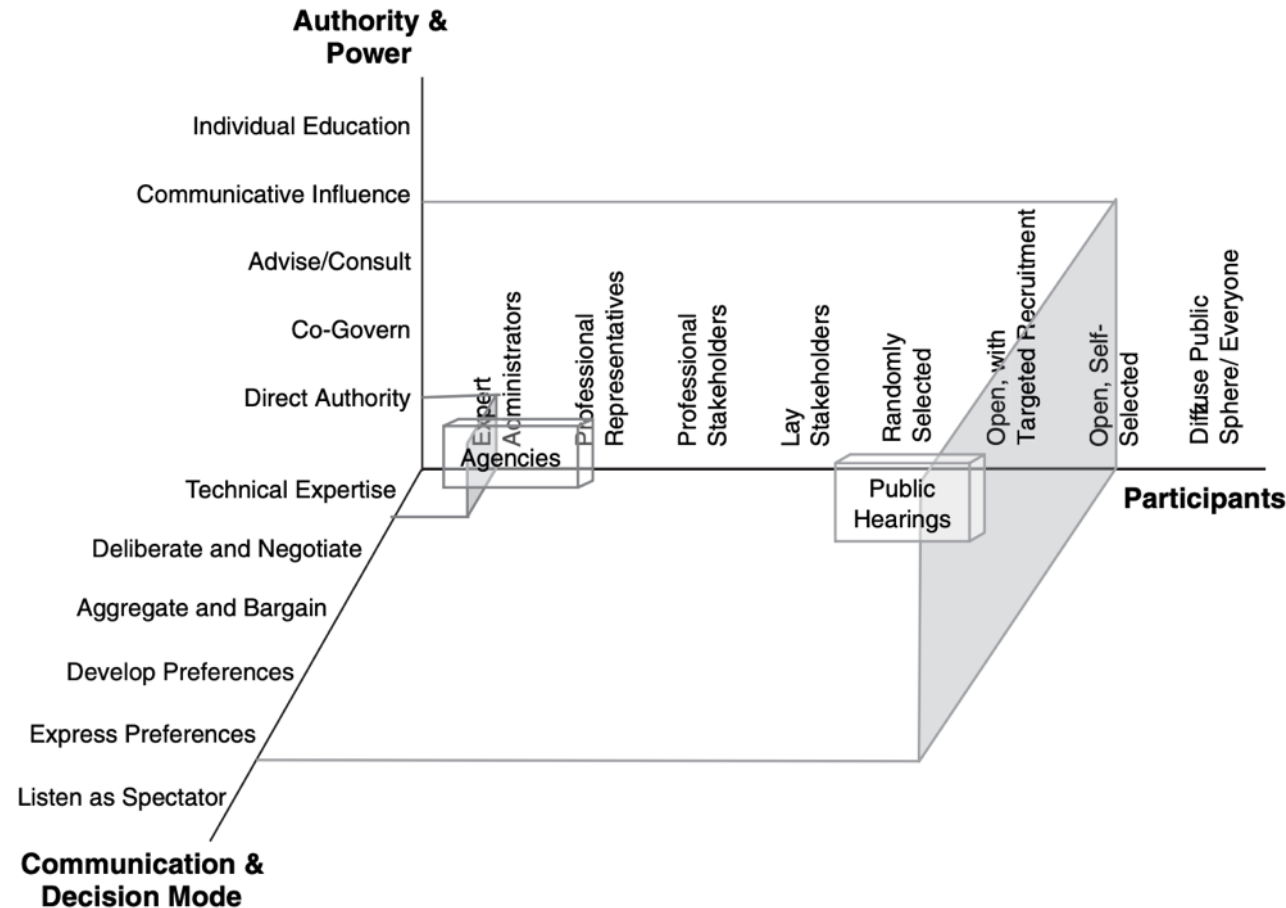
Page Range: 134–136



What is public participation? Classic models



Arnstein's Ladder of participation




Fung's Democracy Cube

What about citizens and energy citizenship?

- Energy citizenship is a novel representation of the public, explicitly disavowing any conceptions of the public as having a 'knowledge deficit'
- Energy citizenship can relate to all aspects of the energy system and changes therein
- Energy citizenship is not limited to local electricity distribution, households, and small-scale renewable energy production, though those topics are overrepresented in some studies
- Key differences between energy citizenship and conventional citizenship

Energy Research & Social Science 98 (2023) 102995

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

 Energy Research & Social Science

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/erss

Perspective

Energy citizenship: A critical perspective

Antti Silvast^{a,b,*}, Govert Valkenburg^b

^a Technical University of Denmark (DTU), DTU Management, Akademivej 258, Lyngby 2800, Denmark
^b Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture, Norway

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Science and technology studies
Citizenship
Participation
Democracy
Energy systems

ABSTRACT

The centrality of energy for daily life entails that citizens' relations to energy need particular attention, to the extent that it might merit a specific concept of energy citizenship. However, the academic literature on energy citizenship has remained small even if it is growing, the concept itself underspecified, and focused on a narrow set of topics that leave many core social science insights on both citizenship and energy governance unaddressed. In this perspective, we analyze the concept of energy citizenship as it is used in the current energy research literature and develop reflections on how and why current approaches do not seem to trigger further specification of the concept. We carry this discussion forward by refining the concept and proposing a new agenda for future energy citizenship research areas. We conclude with three primary outcomes that require more attention when juxtaposing energy and citizenship: the question of who counts as a 'citizen' in energy citizenship initiatives, interrelations between democratic cultures and citizenship, and diverse citizenships enacted among various kinds of energy infrastructure.

Or even “energy democracy”?

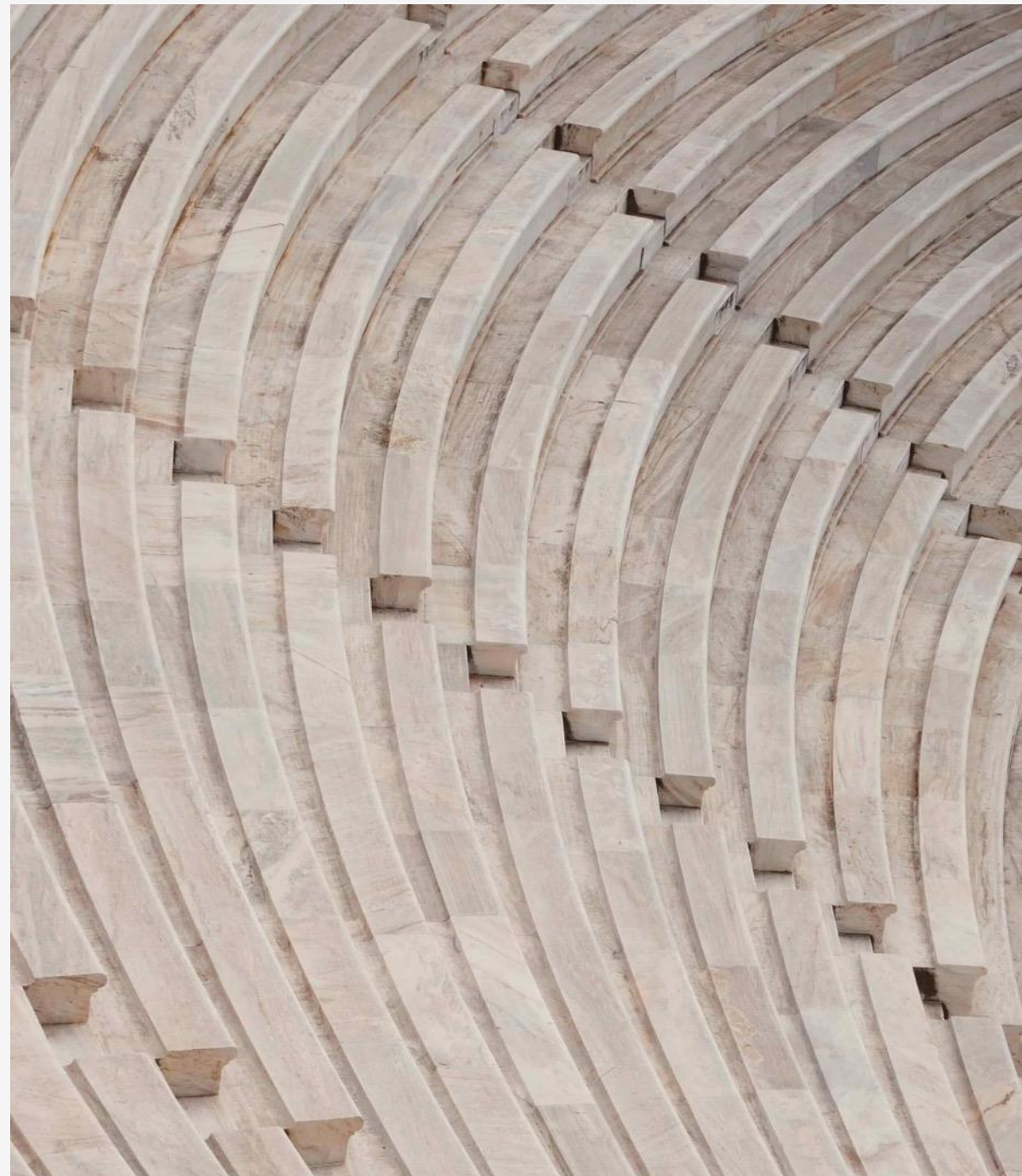
Szulecki defines this concept aiming to

- “to understand energy democracy as an **ideal political goal**, in which the citizens are the **recipients, stakeholders (as consumers/producers) and accountholders** of the entire energy sector policy.”
- “Governance in energy democracy should be characterized by **wide participation** of informed, aware, and responsible political subjects, in an inclusive and transparent decision-making process relating to energy choices, with the public good as its goal.”
- “To create and safeguard **civic empowerment and autonomy**, high levels of **ownership** of energy generation and transmission infrastructure through private, cooperative or communal/public means are necessary.”

What is our research interest?

1. General empirical interest in **how things work** in practice and materially
2. Develop this pragmatic agenda on **democracy, participation, resilience, justice**, and related topics
3. Extend the idea of democracy and the methods of participation to **people not involved in public issues**

15.12.2025



Case studies from Finland

The KAISU survey was part of the Finnish Medium-term Climate Policy Plan (KAISU) process and Finnish Energy energy attitudes surveys

Finnish Energy energy attitudes 2024

1. Gender differences
2. Political preference differences
3. Education differences
4. Area differences (next slides)



Finnish Energy energy attitudes 2024

	All	Women	Men	Basic education	Middle education	Higher education	Centre party	True Finns	Social Democrats	I do not vote
Wind power										
5 - Increase significantly	36	39	33	41	27	40	25	20	49	31
4 - Increase slightly	35	33	38	41	36	35	36	28	37	25
3 - Currently adequate	15	12	18	9	20	13	25	20	7	15
2 - Decrease slightly	5	4	6	5	6	4	6	12	2	8
1 - Decrease significantly	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	12	3	17
Do not know	4	7	1	1	7	3	2	7	3	4
Average	3.96	4.03	3.92	4.11	3.82	4.02	3.73	3.34	4.31	3.49

Sometimes policy makers fail to recognize citizens's situations

"If the government donates the car. My work run is 70 km. My car costs 2000,-. And I'm supposed to buy a low-emission electric hybrid car with that!"

"Once used cars are available at a reasonable price – that is, in about 10-15 years."

Rural residents' responses to "what would make you purchase a low-emission/electric car?" in the public consultation for the long-term climate plan (KAISU)

"As soon as low-emission cars aren't soulless boxes."

"At the moment, nothing, because it isn't possible economically, and I can't maintain a contraption that is full of electronics ... electronics also don't work in the Finnish climate without acting out."

Material Democracy

Developing methods for new understanding of participatory practices in energy and climate policies

Democracy of “deliberation” or participatory debate

1. Involving citizens leads to decisions that better reflect the public interest than not involving citizens in decisions
2. This research does not claim that citizens are in a better position to make decisions than experts, but that they usually have information and insight that experts do not have
3. It is difficult to demonstrate that technical decisions are automatically improved by listening to the public.
4. It is therefore important that the involvement of citizens increases the sense of legitimacy of political decisions.
 - Participants should be representative of the wider population, be independent, be involved in decision-making at an early stage, be able to influence it in a proven and transparent way, be empowered and carry out defined tasks.

Example:



- Consensus conferences in Denmark
- source:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtypeFqAj-wk&ab_channel=Teknologi raadetdk

Example:



- Consensus conferences in Denmark
- source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YypeFqAj-wk&ab_channel=Teknologiraadetdk

Research on citizens' conferences

- It is difficult to find recommendations from consensus conferences as part of practical policy
- That doesn't mean that the conferences didn't have other kinds of effects
- Funding for consensus conferences in 2000-2010 was cut sharply
- Their activities – in their own opinion – receive less and less attention in public debate
- In 2010, the last consensus conference was held in 2005
- In 2010, there was not a single plan for the upcoming conference
- The background seems to have been a more general "anti-expert" political climate – which, surprisingly, was also directed against citizens' conferences – with an emphasis on completely free public debate

S|S|S

ABSTRACT In response to the recent troubled history of risk-related technological development in Europe, one institutional reaction has been to advocate public deliberation as a means of achieving broad societal consensus over socio-scientific futures. We focus on 'consensusing' and the expectation of consensus, and consider both their roots and their performative consequences. We argue that consensus should be seen not simply as the absence of disagreement, but as a particular political and ideological formation. We consider and explore the Danish model based on the *folkelig* concept of the common good, before turning to the wider European movement towards consensus-building. As presented here, consensusing becomes a focus for political contestation but also for nation- and institution-building. Rather than evaluating deliberation solely in terms of its short-term instrumental effects, consensusing should also be understood as performative of national and international identity.

Keywords consensus, consensus conferences, governance of science and technology, Grundtvig, public engagement and deliberation

Nations at Ease with Radical Knowledge

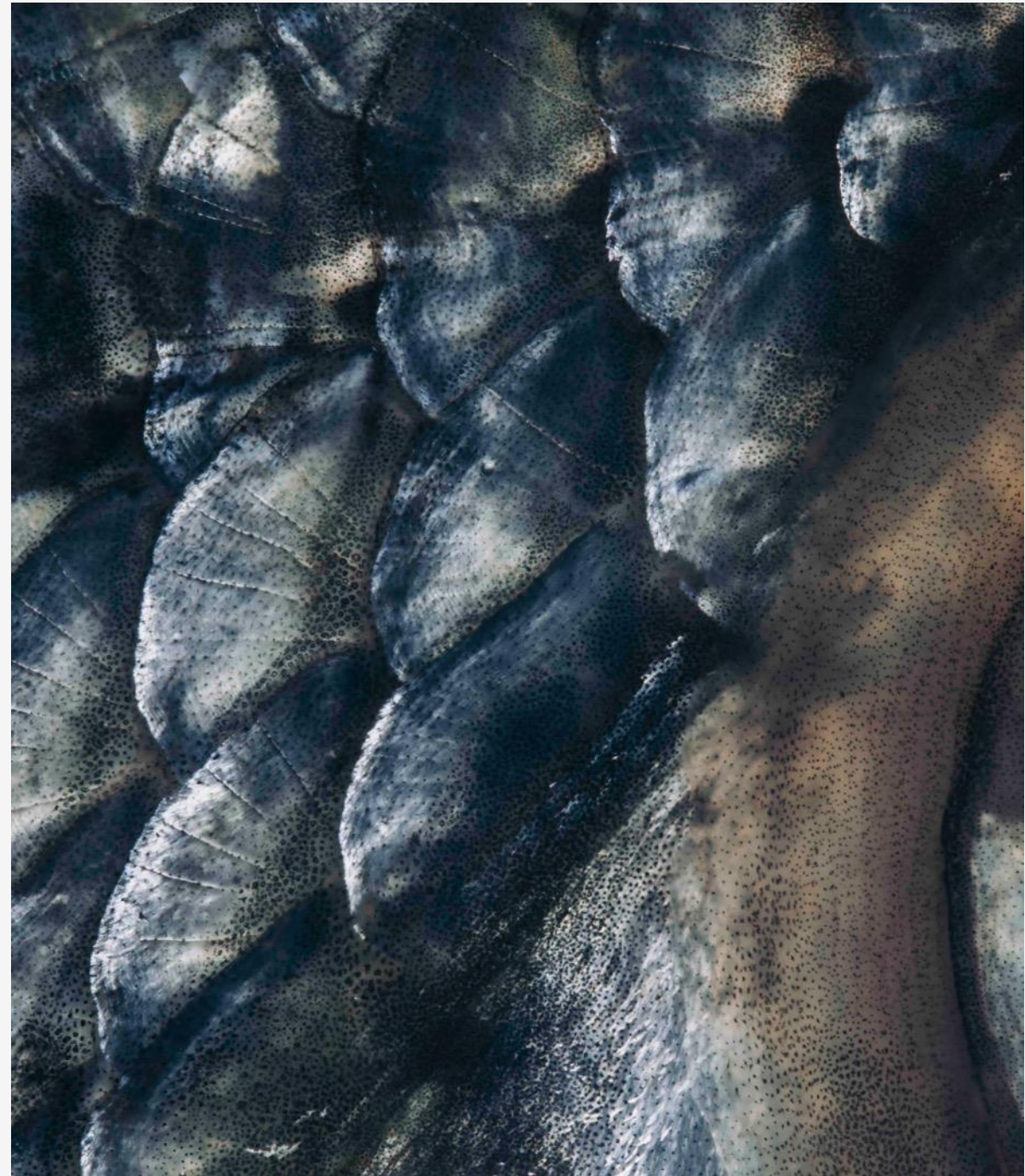
On Consensus, Consensusing and False Consensusness

Maja Horst and Alan Irwin

Material Democracy project

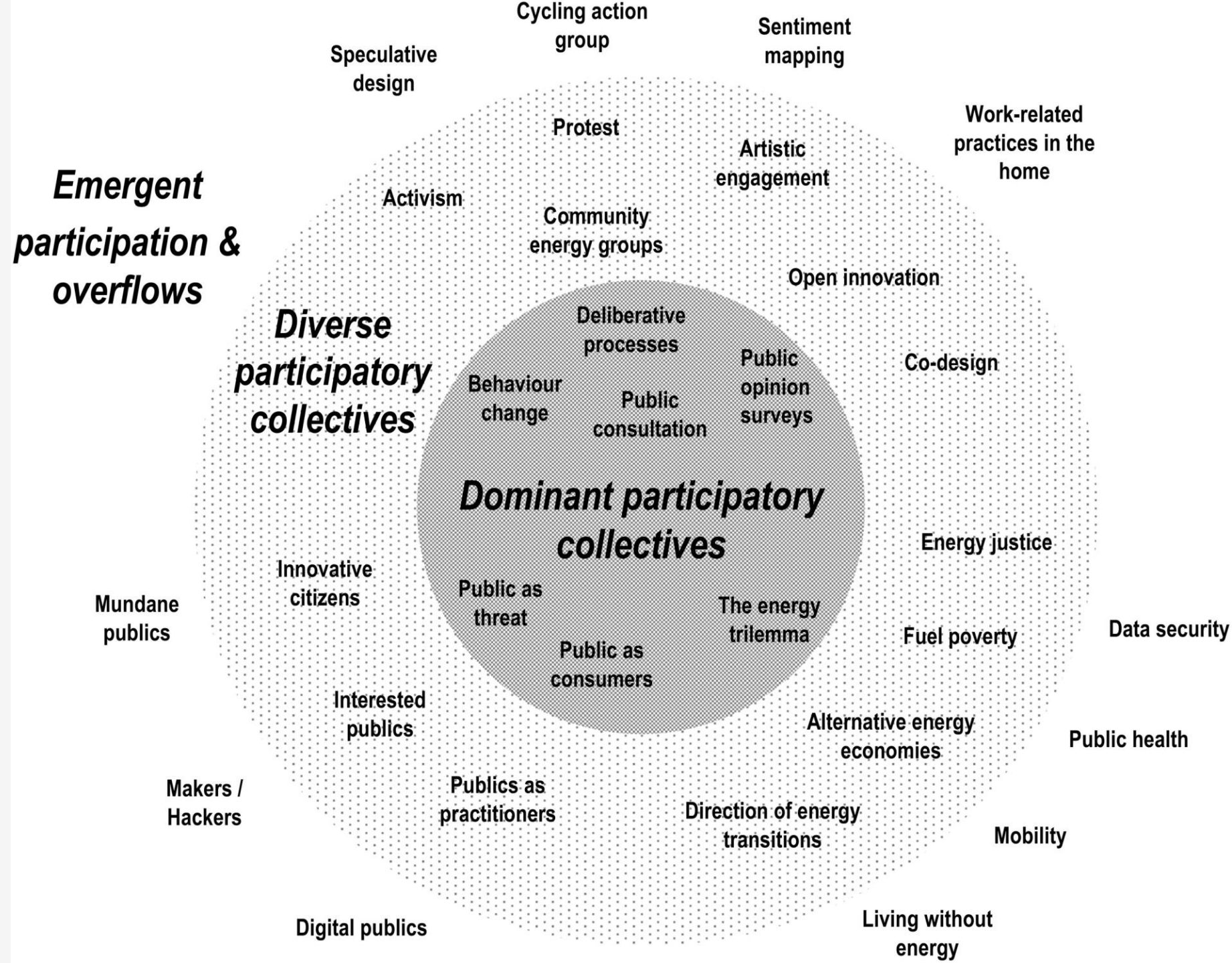
- Studies participation in the preparation and implementation of Finland's environmental and energy policy.
- The aim is to develop operating methods in which more open participation genuinely benefits the preparation and implementation of policy.
- The project develops a new material perspective on participation, i.e. we study the practical organisation and arrangements of participatory practices and processes. We will consider the role of such material conditions in enabling genuine participation.

15.12.2025



Mapping participation

The ecology of inclusion: who engages and how activating is participation?
Source: Chilvers et al. 2018



Mapping Participation for Democratic Innovations:

An experiment in evaluating a citizens' panel on home energy decarbonisation

Jason Chilvers & Phedeas Stephanides

<https://doi.org/10.5286/UKERC.EDC.000966>

November 2023



Mapping Diverse Public Engagements with Nature and Biodiversity

Jason Chilvers, Elliot Honeybun-Arnolda, Paul Hinds & Helen Pallett

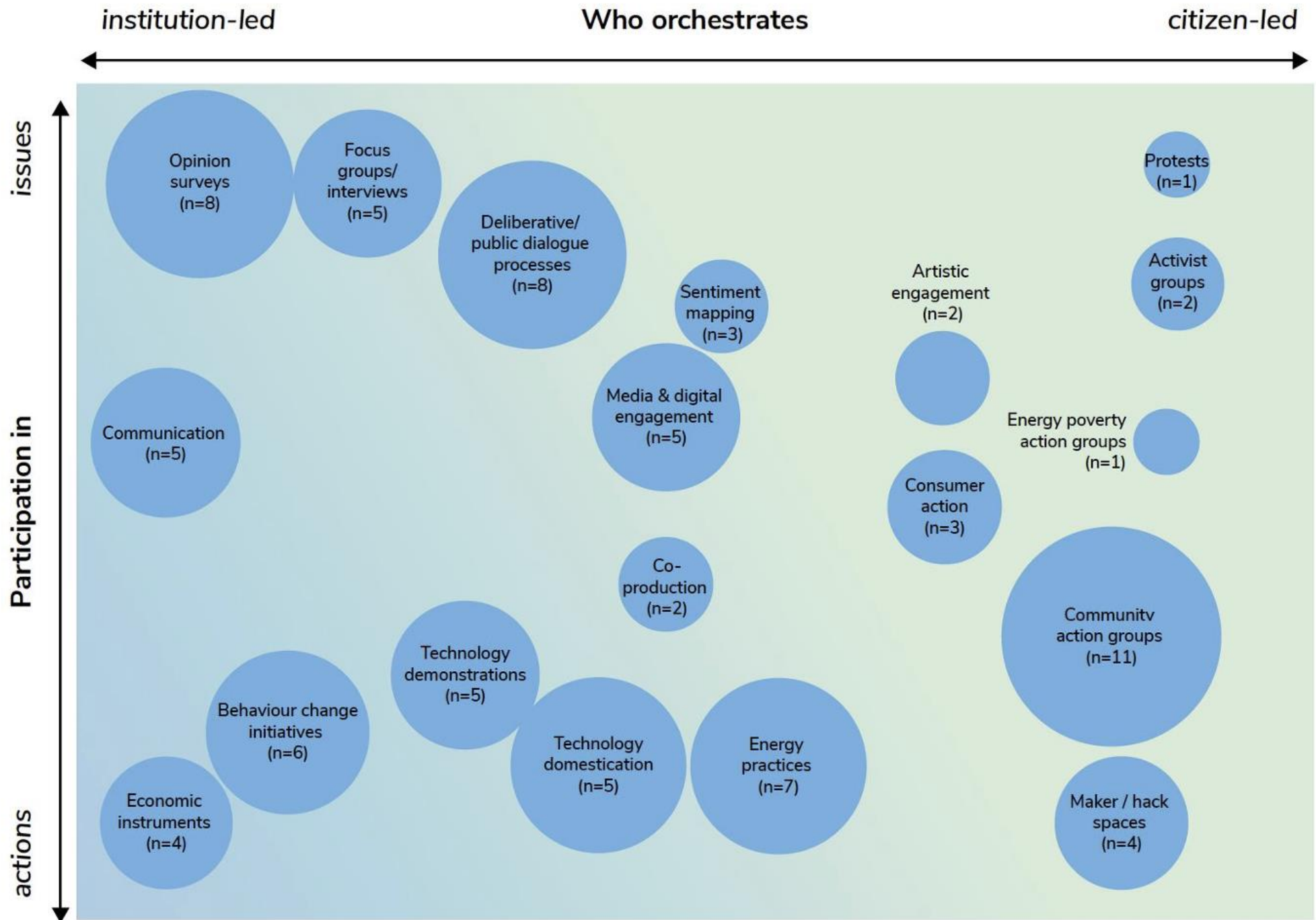


Starting points of the model

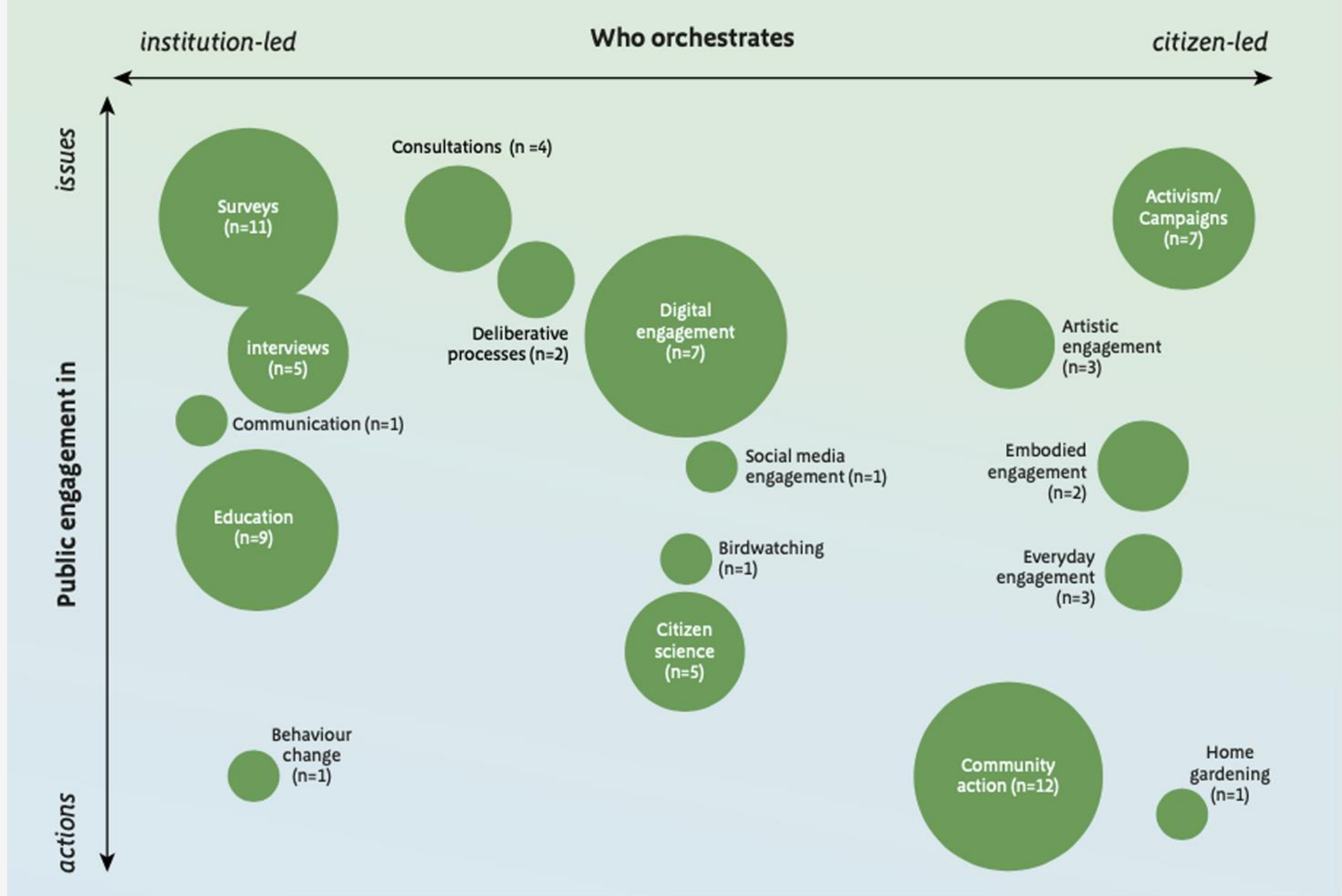
- “Public engagement and participation are increasingly seen as crucial to addressing problems associated with nature and biodiversity.”
- “Dominant and popular approaches to public engagement – focused on communication to the public and discrete one-off engagement events – are not enough on their own to deal with the systemic nature of the challenge. “



- Chilvers, J. & Stephanides, P. (2023) Mapping Participation for Democratic Innovations: An Experiment in Evaluating a Citizens' Panel on Home Energy Decarbonisation. London: UK Energy Research Centre.

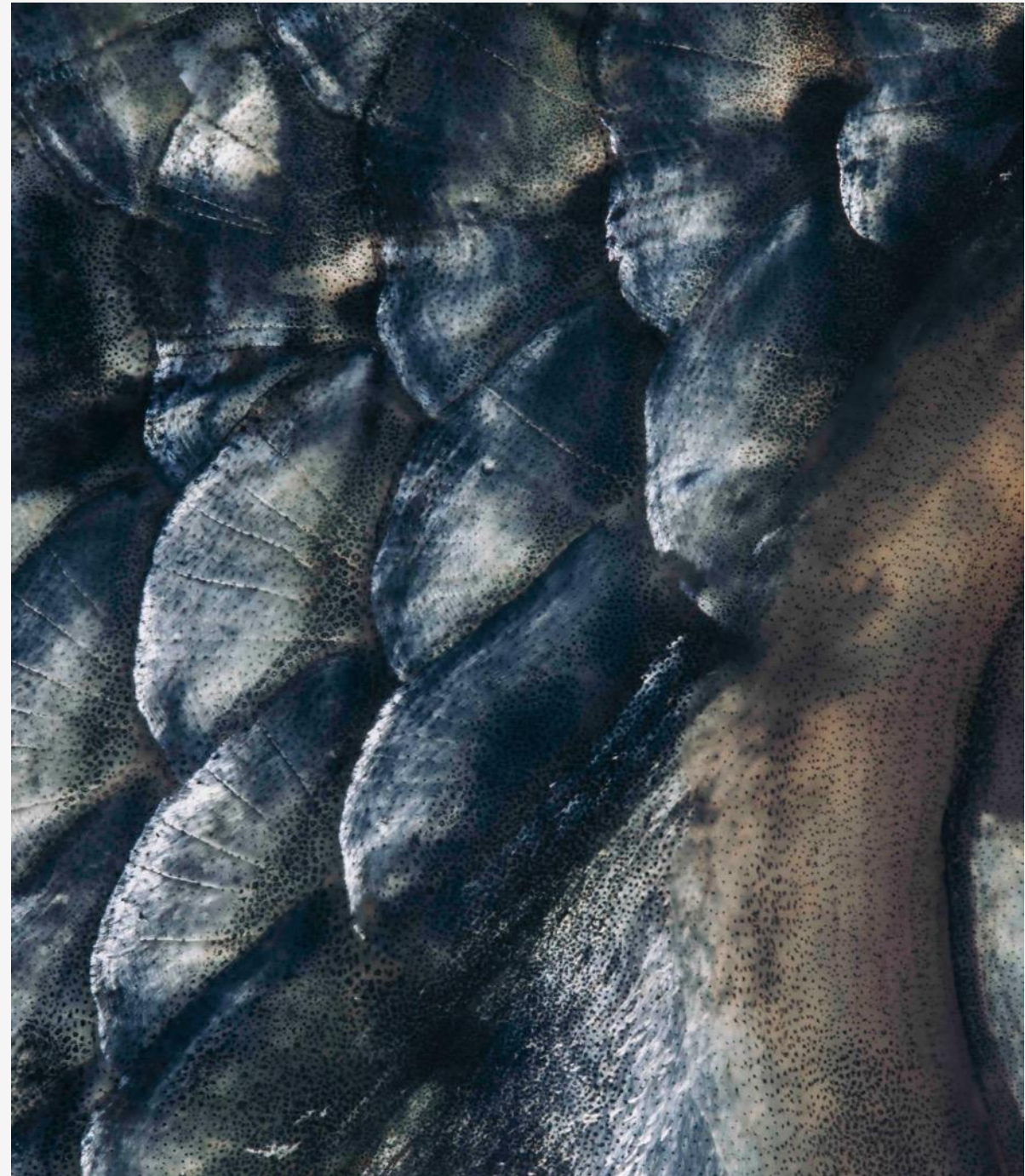


- Chilvers, J., Honeybun-Arnolda, E., Hinds, P. & Pallett, H. (2024) Mapping Diverse Public Engagements with Nature and Biodiversity. Norwich: 3S Research Group & Natural England.



Conclusions

- Deliberative democracy emphasises the participation and discussion of citizens. The starting point is that parliamentary democracy (voting) is a good way to participate in decision-making, but it does not bring out citizens' thoughts, experiences and values.
- The participation of citizens in democratic debate and decision-making is a right defined in the Constitution of Finland. Therefore, citizens are offered different ways to participate in the decision-making of central government and municipalities/regions.
- Citizens are offered opportunities to participate in decision-making, because that is part of good governance. However, it is difficult to show that the voice of citizens is always heard in decision-making or, on the other hand, that it would automatically improve by listening to the citizens.



Connections

LUT University, Department of Social and Communication Sciences

Antti Silvast (WP Leader), Associate Professor (Tenure Track), antti.silvast@lut.fi

Acknowledgements:

I acknowledge the help and content from Professor Eva Heiskanen, University of Helsinki

 <https://materialdemocracy.fi/hanke>

 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/material-democracy/>