

Report on the C-Up Citizens' Assembly Light project

31 December 2024

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Section 1. Context and aims of the project

The CPDC C-Up context

In May 2024 the Cyprus Peace and Dialogue Centre (CPDC) launched the initiative entitled, “Civic initiative for an updated Cyprus peace process design (C-Up)”.¹ The CPDC C-Up initiative is inspired by the absence of a negotiated settlement of the Cyprus problem; structural defects in the largely unchanged, decades-old methodology for negotiations in Cyprus;² low trust in political parties and political leaderships in both communities;³ and calls from the UN Security Council and the UN Secretary-General for meaningful civil society engagement in peace efforts in Cyprus.⁴ The C-Up initiative was acknowledged by the UN Secretary-General in his Good Offices Mission report of July 2024.⁵ C-Up is an iterative process, exploring methodologies for a carefully designed deliberative democracy process, which opens out to a representative cross-section of ordinary citizens, and which allows them the time, space and resources to propose common solutions to difficult policy questions, especially those relating to a settlement of the Cyprus problem. For example, citizens could be tasked via a citizens’ assembly to tackle questions relating to the *design* of the negotiations process or, depending on the support of the political leadership, to tackle questions relating to the *substance* of the negotiations.

In the words of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which has an extensive database of resources on citizens’ assemblies,⁶ citizens’ assemblies “convene groups of people representing a wide cross-section of society for at least one full day – and often much longer – to learn, deliberate, and develop collective recommendations that consider the complexities and compromises required for solving multifaceted public issues.”⁷ C-Up’s ultimate aim, therefore, is to support a fully-fledged citizens’ assembly that abides by the best practices devised by both the OECD and DemocracyNext—one of the world’s leaders in citizen assembly design.⁸

Following the initial launch of C-Up in May 2024, CPDC co-organised with Prof. Amanda Perry-Kessaris of Kent Law School a workshop in November 2024 entitled, “What if a citizens’ assembly were to design a future Cyprus peace process?”⁹ Lessons learned from the launch in

¹ See CPDC, “[Key take-outs from the first workshop of the Civic initiative for an updated Cyprus peace process design \(“C-Up”\) on 28 May 2024](#)”.

² Outlined in “[Deliberative Democracy, the only way out of the Cyprus problem?](#)” By Fiona Mullen, 8 January 2024, *Financial Mirror*.

³ See *Standard Eurobarometer 102*, Public Opinion in the European Union, October-November 2024, data annex.

⁴ Most recently in [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2723 \(2024\)](#) of 30 January 2024, and [Report of the Secretary-General on his mission of good offices in Cyprus](#), S/2024/526, 5 July 2024.

⁵ Paragraph 10 of Report S/2024/526.

⁶ OECD, [Open government and citizenship participation](#), portal and related publications.

⁷ OECD, “[Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave](#)”, 10 June 2020.

⁸ [DemocracyNext](#), website and related publications.

⁹ “[What if a citizens’ assembly were to design a future Cyprus peace process?](#)” By Prof. Amanda Perry-Kessaris, 3 November 2024. The November workshop was funded by a Socio-Legal Studies Association (SLSA) Impact Grant and governed by the University of Kent Research Ethics Policies and Practice framework.

May and the workshop in November fed into the design of the C-Up Citizens' Assembly Light project implemented in December.

In December 2024 CPDC was able to test this initiative with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through the pilot titled, the *C-Up Citizens' Assembly Light* project.

The UNDP context

UNDP Cyprus supported the *C-Up Citizens' Assembly Light* project as part of its Green and Just Transition portfolio design, placing social listening at the centre of the process. Through a range of channels, including interviews, discussions, and engagement with civil society, UNDP gathered diverse perspectives, with a focus on reaching communities not previously engaged.

The portfolio's Green and Just Transition theme, served as a relevant and practical entry point to test a broader hypothesis on citizen-led deliberative approaches, introduced by CPDC in May 2024. Given its direct relevance to everyday life across the island, the theme provided a suitable basis for piloting the C-Up initiative, while generating lessons for the potential design of larger-scale deliberative processes linked to the Cyprus negotiation context.

The project piloted a 'light' citizens' assembly approach, delivered by CPDC. Four assemblies across both communities explored the theme of Green Transition, generating community insights on needs, challenges, and priorities.

These insights directly informed portfolio development, while also testing a citizen-centred deliberative approach to strengthen inclusive engagement and contribute to peacebuilding efforts. The initiative further produced practical lessons for future scale-up, including approaches to participant selection, effective formats, resource needs, and strategies to address sensitivities and misinformation.

Aims of the C-Up Citizens' Assembly Light project

In the *C-Up Citizens' Assembly Light* project, the aim was to conduct a short, compact "Citizens' Assembly", to gather participants' views on the green and just transition agenda and explore its significance to them in the Cyprus context. Participants were introduced to the concept of a citizens' assembly and the contexts in which they have been held in different locations across the world. They were asked to think about the topic of energy in their daily lives. They were then presented with expert input about what green transition is and what it might entail for Cyprus, specifically in relation to the impact of electric vehicles, given the then plans in Japan, the UK and Europe—the source of most vehicles in Cyprus—to stop producing or selling combustion-engine vehicles by 2035.

Participants were then split into groups to deliberate on a specific policy question relating to ensuring a just and fair transition to electric vehicles (see Section 2: Methodology). This approach served two objectives: first, to understand people's perspectives, including the challenges and opportunities they associate with the topic of green transition; and second, to

assess what could be suitable themes for deeper exploration through a real-scale Citizens' Assembly process.

Section 2. Methodology

Emulating OECD principles

According to the OECD, the format of a citizens' assembly should have the following 11 principles (emphasis and numbers added).

1. *"The task should be clearly defined as a question that is linked to a public problem.*
2. *The commissioning authority should publicly commit to responding to or acting on recommendations in a timely manner and should monitor and regularly report on the progress of their implementation.*
3. *Anyone should be able to easily find the following information about the process: its purpose, design, methodology, recruitment details, experts, recommendations, the authority's response, and implementation follow-up. Better public communication should increase opportunities for public learning and encourage greater participation.*
4. *Participants should be a microcosm of the general public; this can be achieved through random sampling from which a representative selection is made to ensure the group matches the community's demographic profile.*
5. *Efforts should be made to ensure inclusiveness, such as through remuneration, covering expenses, and/or providing/paying for childcare or eldercare.*
6. *Participants should have access to a wide range of accurate, relevant, and accessible evidence and expertise, and have the ability to request additional information.*
7. *Group deliberation entails finding common ground; this requires careful and active listening, weighing and considering multiple perspectives, every participant having an opportunity to speak, a mix of formats, and skilled facilitation.*
8. *For high-quality processes that result in informed recommendations, participants should meet for at least four full days in person, as deliberation requires adequate time for participants to learn, weigh evidence, and develop collective recommendations.*
9. *To help ensure the integrity of the process, it should be run by an arm's length co-ordinating team.*
10. *There should be respect for participants' privacy to protect them from unwanted attention and preserve their independence.*
11. *Deliberative processes should be evaluated against these principles to ensure learning, help improve future practice, and understand impact."*¹⁰

The aim in the *C-Up Citizens' Assembly Light* project was to emulate these OECD principles as far as feasible given the shorter timeframe of the deliberation.

- Thus, for Principle 1) on clearly defining the question, given that the pilot assemblies took place over two to three hours, not four days (Principle 8), a single question was chosen for deliberation to ensure clarity and focus.
- As Principle 2) on political commitment was not possible, participants were instead asked to "imagine" that they had been asked by their political leaderships to make policy proposals.

¹⁰ OECD, [*Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions, Catching the Deliberative Wave*](#), 2020.

- To achieve Principle 3) on information, participants were given information about the event and its aims both before via phone and email and at the beginning of the event (see Appendix 5 Informed consent form).
- Achieving Principle 4) on a microcosm of society was greatly aided by the wide and deep networks of CPDC, as well as the complementary use of the University of Cyprus University Centre for Field Studies (UCFS) Online Panel database.
- To achieve Principle 5) on inclusiveness sessions were held outside of classic working hours and in participants' own language. Future sessions should consider budgeting in advance for a small remuneration for attendance in line with best practice.
- For Principle 6) on access to evidence, each Citizens' Assembly Light had an expert input session on green transition and how it might affect them directly
- To achieve Principle 7) on common ground, participants were coached on the need to respect one another's views and find consensus, then divided into groups and asked to come to a consensus on three proposals.
- Principle 8) (at least four days) was not the aim for this "light" version of a citizens' assembly but participants were given a single question to try to emulate plenty of time to deliberate.
- Principle 9) on the coordinating team was not directly relevant for these purposes. Nevertheless, it was important that UNDP, CPDC and those who supported the coordination and implementation came from organisations that were familiar to, and trusted by, the participants.
- For Principle 10) participants were reassured that they would not be identified in their responses.
- For Principle 11) on evaluation, this report and the lessons learned form part of an ongoing evaluation process for the C-Up project.

Following DemocracyNext format on the day

A second aim was to follow as closely as possible the classic format of a citizens' assembly, as outlined by DemocracyNext.¹¹ This involves:

- Welcome and introduction.
- Identifying shared values. This was achieved via the question to participants about how they use energy in their daily lives.
- Learning. This was achieved via the expert input, translated in the participants' own language: Turkish or Greek, respectively.
- Deliberation and consensus-building. This was achieved via the 30-minute group work.
- Innovative practices. Incorporating elements of the inter-species council conducted by CPDC in November was considered. But in the interests of time, this innovative practice was not used. However, it could be considered for longer-format assemblies.
- Extending deliberation. This was generally not required as the focus was on one question only.

¹¹ DemocracyNext, Assembling an Assembly Guide, [How does the Assembly unfold in the room?](#).

- Drafting recommendations. This was achieved during the group work.
- Voting. This was achieved by distributing Post-it notes, in which participants wrote simply the number of their top five favourite suggestions. This also supported the privacy of voting.
- Taking a group decision. This was achieved by highlighting the top three recommendations.
- Delivering the recommendations. As a “what if” project, the delivery of recommendations in this case is only to the funders and organisers.

Selection of locations and time-slot

In consultation with UNDP a deliberate choice was made to conduct the “light” assemblies outside of the capital, Nicosia. Nicosia is often chosen as a place for mono- or inter-communal activities relating to the Cyprus problem, as it is home to all of the UN missions in Cyprus, including UNDP Cyprus, and has meeting places within easy reach inside the UN-monitored buffer zone. Moving outside of Nicosia reflected a conscious choice to reach people who do not often take part in bicommunal or intercommunal activities or activities associated with peacebuilding activities.

Four locations were chosen, with the aim of including one urban and one rural location in each community. In the Turkish Cypriot community the sessions were held in Lefke/Lefka (rural) and Famagusta (urban). In the Greek Cypriot community the sessions were held in Larnaca (urban) and Deryneia (rural). An initial effort to hold a session in Morphou was abandoned when it transpired that it was not possible to find a suitable hotel or other appropriate accommodation at short notice.

In order to achieve Principle 4) above and to attract a broad spread of people, including those working full time or with primary care duties, the sessions were deliberately held outside classic “nine to five” working hours. Thus, both of the sessions in the Turkish Cypriot community were held on a Saturday morning, while both of the sessions in the Greek Cypriot community were held at “5:30pm for a 5:45pm start” on a weekday evening.

Decision about mono-communal sessions

In view of considerations about the budget and delivery schedule and the fact that this was an initial test, the decision was taken to hold the sessions mono-communally, in the participants’ own language. The reasoning was as follows. First, the organisers’ experience from running other exercises is that inter-communal sessions that aim to reach people who are not typically involved in intercommunal activities require a much longer lead time to organise. Second, they would require simultaneous interpretation, which can be very costly and time-consuming to organise. In addition, if the requirement remained to hold them outside Nicosia, this would raise a number of logistical questions about where they could be held, given that some participants might not be comfortable taking part in locations outside their own community, might be reluctant to cross into the other community, or might resent an intercommunal event not being

held on “their” side, and so on. In short, inter-communal, in-person sessions would need either weeks or months of lead-time to plan and organise.

Technology can, of course, address some of these issues. Indeed, CPDC has been involved in exercises with the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus (OSASG) that used simultaneous language interpretation, assisted by Remesh.ai artificial intelligence (ai), to engage the youth in both communities. However, the aim for the *C-Up Citizens’ Assembly Light* project was to reach a broader cross-section of society, including those who might not be familiar with technology.¹² Therefore, in-person sessions were deemed more appropriate.

In the first three sessions (Lefke, Famagusta, Larnaca), the expert input was presented in English by the person who prepared it, with consecutive interpretation by the facilitator. As this slowed down the process, the decision was taken in the final session in Deryneia to have the facilitator present the expert input, while the person who prepared it remained available in the room for clarifications.

Section 3. Collective analysis and reflections

The analysis in this section is drawn from remarks made by participants, proposals made by participants, as well as impressions of the 4-6 project implementers and supporters who attended the sessions each time. This section first discusses overarching narratives and then outlines narratives within each session.

Common narratives and proposals

In all four sessions there were three common narratives on the green and just transition: 1) concerns that their political leadership was behind in implementing green transition and the infrastructure required; 2) concerns about the health or environmental impact of batteries or photovoltaics; and 3) a general mistrust in the political leadership, leading to lack of trust that the green transition would be fairly distributed. Thus, while overall “climate scepticism” did not dominate, there were concerns about specific issues.

As regards proposals for ensuring that the impact of the transition electric cars was fairly distributed, subsidies or other financial incentives were by far the most common suggestion.

Possible hidden/underlying narratives

A not-so-hidden underlying narrative was mistrust in the political leadership and some suspicions that the green transition, or some policies such as photovoltaic parks, were an agenda pushed by corporations or well connected businesses and political leaderships who stood to benefit financially. This was stronger in the Greek Cypriot rural community (Deryneia) than in other sessions but it was not entirely absent from other sessions either.

¹² It is noticeable that participants in Lefke did not want communication on email, for example.

Urban/rural differences

In Lefke (rural Turkish Cypriot community) there was greater distrust towards political leaderships than in the urban population of Famagusta. Residents felt that rural regions were systematically neglected by the political leadership and expressed strong concerns about preserving the Lefke region's greenery and protecting its environment. Consequently, they showed a particular interest in cross-party collaboration on environmental issues.

One key difference in the Greek Cypriot community between the rural (Deryneia) and urban (Larnaca) participants was a tendency to mistrust the motives of the political leadership in pushing for transition, although at least one participant also expressed this view in Larnaca. This is likely to be because people living in rural areas are more directly affected by the green transition. They tend to live in areas with little or no public transport. In Deryneia it was said that agricultural land is increasingly being re-purposed for photovoltaic parks, or that the political leadership processed applications for converting state land into photovoltaics much faster than applications to utilise state land for agricultural purposes. In the Greek Cypriot community these concerns are also related to a string of scandals, including ones relating to energy, reports about “hoarding” of photovoltaic licences¹³ and related concerns about corruption.

Views on citizens' assemblies

The organisers introduced from the second session onwards a question at the end, asking participants what they felt about the experience and the idea of citizens' assemblies in general. A dominant theme was that they had enjoyed taking part in the session and that they found it useful, while many said that they appreciated being asked their opinion. In some cases they made suggestions for citizens' assemblies on other topics, while in Deryneia they asked the local community representative who had attended whether he would be implementing citizens' assemblies for their own community.

Section 4. Observations and lessons learned on methodology

General observations

Participants in Lefke, Famagusta and Deryneia clearly felt comfortable in the space provided. They made frequent interjections and eagerly took part in the discussions, the proposals and the voting. In some cases they ‘jumped ahead’ to suggestions before being asked for them. The space in Larnaca (a hotel) was larger and more formal (which is often the case in fully fledged citizens' assemblies) but participants warmed up after the introductions and made a similar level of interventions as in the other three sessions.

¹³ “[ΑΗΚ: Ζητά επιτακτικά άδειες για φωτοβολταϊκά πάρκα](#)” [EAC: Urgently requests permits for photovoltaic parks], by Iros Efthymiou, 20 June 2024, StockWatch.

In all four sessions participants expressed a wish to participate again in such an exercise. Participants in Famagusta suggested they should organise some themselves, while participants in Deryneia, after the conclusion of the session, turned to the local community representative who was present expressing the view that citizens' assemblies should be implemented for their own local community.

What worked well

Friendly environment. The training session successfully fostered a friendly and inclusive atmosphere. Participants felt comfortable expressing their ideas freely, which contributed to open and meaningful discussions. Communication among the group was smooth, creating a safe space for exchanging diverse perspectives.

Input sessions. The input sessions were well received and deemed highly beneficial. These sessions provided participants with clear aims for the training and introduced the necessary terminology to facilitate discussion of the topics. This approach ensured that all participants had a shared understanding of key concepts, enabling more focused and informed conversations.

Effective facilitator and expert contribution. The facilitator demonstrated strong skills in guiding the discussions, ensuring that every participant had an opportunity to express their opinions. By explaining session aims clearly and steering conversations constructively, the facilitator maintained engagement and focus throughout. Additionally, the expert's input was valuable, offering well articulated and relevant information that enriched the training experience.

Adaptations from one session to another

After the first session in Lefke, the organisers made the following observations, which were then used to adapt to the subsequent sessions.

1. *Pacing.* Pacing was good. Just getting participants to focus on one question worked well for the time available. More questions would have been too much.
2. *On-screen proposals.* Writing the proposals on-screen so that they were visible to all worked well.
3. *Voting method.* Voting by writing five numbers on a Post-it note and handing it to the facilitator worked well and quickly.
4. *Focusing on the question.* People did not always answer the specific question: how to make it a fair transition. Their policy recommendations seemed to focus on how to do green transition more generally, not how to make sure it is not unfair. In subsequent sessions the facilitators emphasised more that the fairness of transition should be the focus.
5. *New question.* Question to ask at the end. Did they like the idea of a citizens' assembly?

6. Slides were adapted to be less specific for future sessions.

7. *Order of subject matter.* After Lefke, the order in which subjects were discussed was switched around. Thus, a general introduction to citizens' assemblies was presented before participants introduced themselves and before they discussed how they use energy in their daily lives. In Famagusta, Larnaca and Deryneia participants were also asked at the end what they thought of the citizens' assembly process, in order to gain feedback on the process.

8. *Consecutive interpretation.* In response to the consecutive interpretation slowing down proceedings, in Deryneia the expert input was delivered by the facilitator. In future, short "light" sessions, the expert input should probably be shorter while for a more fully fledged assembly a panel of experts could present on the subject matter.

Areas for improvement

Venue and seating arrangements. One of the venues was relatively small and the arrangement was not ideal for discussions and group work. A U-shaped seating configuration was used for all subsequent sessions. The formality of another venue proved helpful in providing an environment where participants were more willing to focus on the process, follow instructions and exchange views in a more organised manner.

Clarity of terminology in presentations. Some terminology used in the PowerPoint presentations was unclear to the participants. Direct translations of terms appeared to create confusion in some cases. Providing clearer definitions or using context-specific explanations for such terms would help avoid misunderstandings and ensure that participants grasp key concepts more effectively.

Addressing conspiracy tendencies and potential scepticism about experts

A small number of participants expressed unorthodox theories, such as photovoltaics are bad for one's health or that kettles radiate harmful waves. While these views did not dominate in the proposals and there was no specific resistance to the expert input provided during the four sessions, nor to the notion of green transition more generally, one should be aware in future rounds of some global social trends that mistrust the aims of green transition, as well as the potential for mistrust of leading figures.¹⁴ One way to address this in a full-format citizens' assembly would be to have experts with differing views. Another way in a full-format assembly would be to give participants the time and opportunity to "grill" experts on specific issues, so that they can be reassured about the sources of the expert assertions. Some participants explicitly stated the overall benefit of having multiple experts on the topic present during the assembly.

¹⁴ See Cologna V., Kotcher J., Mede N.G., Besley J., Maibach E.W., Oreskes N., (2024) [Trust in climate science and climate scientists: A narrative review](#). PLOS Clim 3(5): e0000400.

Section 5. Conclusions and the way forward

Green transition themes. Citizens in the four sessions conducted for the *C-Up Citizens' Assembly Light* project were more concerned than hopeful about the impact of green transition on their lives and their communities. While there were few signs of outright “climate scepticism” or denial that anything needs to be done, doubts were expressed about whether some technologies related to green energy, such as lithium batteries and photovoltaic panels, were really environmentally friendly. There was also a general feeling that the political leaderships were not up to the task of green transition and could be captured by vested interests.

Agency of participants. Participant's solutions generally pushed the responsibility onto high-level political leaderships, rather than assigning responsibility to community-level leaderships and/or the household/individual level. This is probably a reflection of the time available for deliberation. Longer sessions could explicitly include what should be done at different levels of society and potentially include more difficult constraints, such as imagining policies had to be implemented with no funds.

Atmosphere for collaborative work. The participants worked well together, were respectful of each others' views and expressed that they found the exercise rewarding. This is in line with the expectation that citizens appreciate being asked about their views and behave well when given agency. The methodology of focusing on a single question and giving participants 30 minutes to deliberate on it together worked well for this “light” version of a citizens' assembly and underlines the need to give people the time and space to reflect on difficult questions.

Timeline and budget questions. Future endeavours would benefit greatly from an implementation schedule of several months and a specific budget-line to support the selection of participants under the close guidance of CPDC, given its wide networks and its deep understanding of the many political sensitivities.

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