Lessons from the French Citizens' Climate Convention

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The French Citizens' Climate Convention (CCC) : a unique experiment in deliberative democracy?
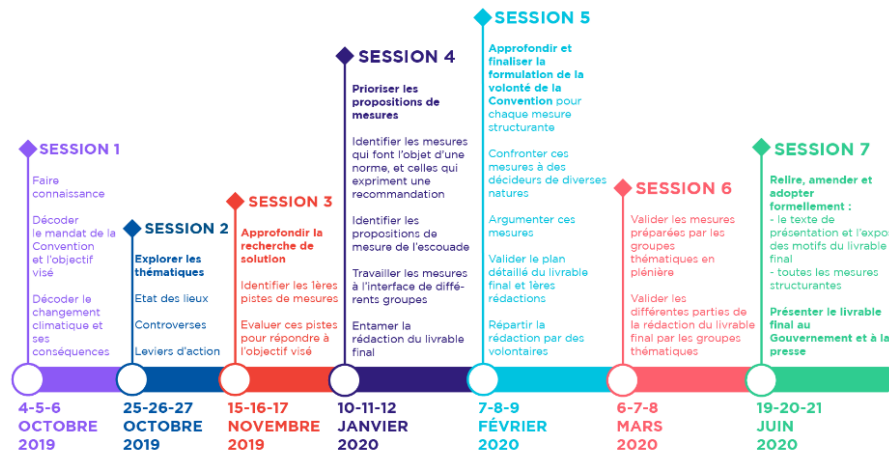
- 150 representative citizens selected by lottery

- Tasked with developing a set of measures to reduce GHG emissions by 40 % by 2030

- Result : 149 recommendations and a climate law voted in 2021

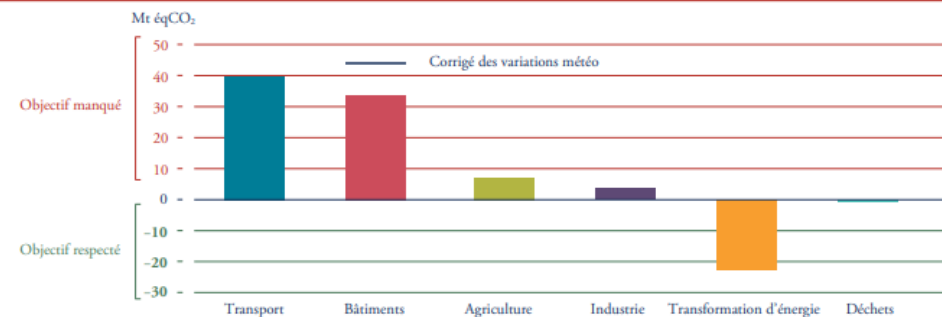Website : https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/

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The French CCC appeared in the context of a crisis

- The CCC : a response to the Yellow Vest movement

- Increasing gap between climate ambition and changes on the ground

- A double response to a democratic and climate crisis

Figure 4 – Écart au premier budget carbone
pour les différents secteurs

Mt éqCO₂

Corrigé des variations météo

Objectif manqué

Objectif respecté

Transport   Bâtiments   Agriculture   Industrie   Transformation d'énergie   Déchets

Note : Un écart positif indique que le budget indicatif a été dépassé. Par exemple, le secteur du transport a dépassé son budget carbone de 40 Mt éqCO₂.

Source : Traitements HCC 2020 d'après Citepa, avril 2020 - Format SECTEN et DGEC (SNBC 2020)

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How to define a successful citizen's convention?

- Objective: produce a set of measures to address the climate crisis that would be both ambitious and fair.

- **Formulate political problems and solutions ≠ the ones produced by experts or elected officials.**

- Formulations should be the result of a **deliberative process** in which citizens have the opportunity to **discuss and argue with each other**.

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The French CCC : an evolving process

- The mandate was ambiguous : « without any filters » but in real life there was filters (and one could argue rightly so…)

- The mandate as a condition for putting tension into the process

- Framing impact of deliberations :
  - five working groups by themes (production, consumption, housing, transport, food)
  - no dedicated discussion on energy, difficult one on finance

- A process that can be understood as co-constructed by the citizens and organizers

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Expertise in the CCC: supporting without replacing the citizens

- Expertise is necessary to support deliberative process but mobilized late and bit hastily in the CCC's case

- Experts provided information and advice to the citizens w/o influencing them….

- …but the citizens eventually came to rely on the group of experts to produce the measures from a certain point

- Influence on citizens also came from outside the convention

- A difficulty : focusing debates on controversies between stakeholders
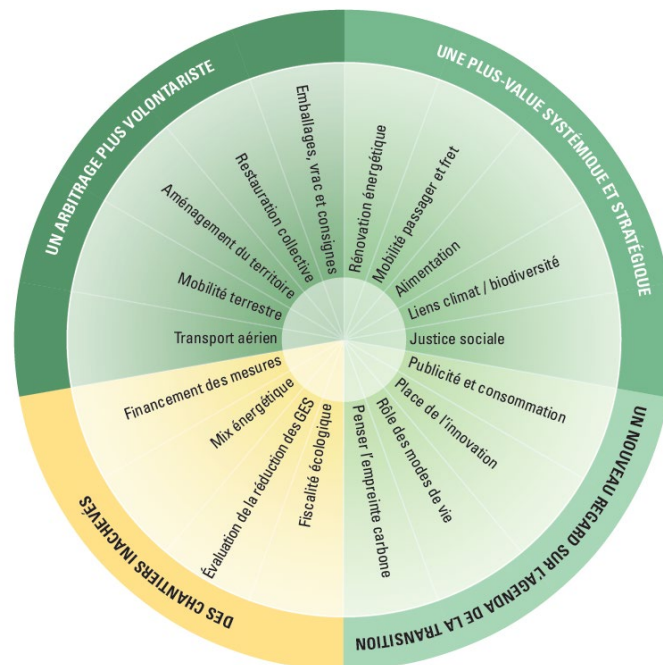
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Evaluating the impact of the measures : mission impossible?

- Impact assessment of proposed measures was not build in in the process.

- What has been done :
  - Indicative climate impact grade based on expert judgement (null – low - medium – high)
  - qualitative feedback situating the proposal compared to existing measures and literature on impact

- As a result : impossible of evaluating whether the set of measures allows to go to -40%

- No assessment on socioeconomic/distributional impacts

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The French CCC's impact on the domestic climate debate

- Changing life experience for participants

- Important political messages: consistency with science, preserving ecosystems, carbon tax alone unfair unless…

- Measures proposed : more ambitious, systemic, innovative ideas on advertisement, education…ended up in a climate and resilience law (62 measures)

- Widely discussed in the media and public forums (including critics !) and monitoring by the government

SCHÉMA RÉCAPITULATIF. Notre évaluation des apports de la Convention Citoyenne pour le climat en quatre catégories

Source: IDDRI (2021) Convention citoyenne pour le climat : 149 mesures pour une nouvelle vision de la transition, étude IDDRI n° 7/2020

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Conclusions / recommendations based on the French CCC

- Be clear about the objectives of the convention and the institutional set up

- Accept to frame the discussions in order to kick-starting deliberation

- Co-construct the process with the citizens

- Use expertise to support the deliberative process

- The connection with the public debate is key

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