

WHERE: **Berlin, Germany**
WHAT: **Citizens' Assembly**
WHEN: **7–9 June 2024**

GERMANY **CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY** ON **CLIMATE-NEUTRAL ECONOMY AND CONSUMPTION**

On **7–9 June 2024**, approximately 60 citizens from Berlin and Brandenburg participated in a Citizens' Assembly in Berlin. The focus was on deliberating pathways to achieving a climate-neutral economy and sustainable consumption patterns. The 1.5-day event was part of the EU research project REAL DEAL, jointly organised by DIALOGIK, Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung (FUE), and the Research Institute for Sustainability (RIFS). Each organisation contributed specific expertise, ranging from deliberative methodologies and facilitation techniques (DIALOGIK) to thematic content and policy implications (FUE) and research framing and conceptual grounding (RIFS).



The Assembly served as a platform for citizens to explore challenges and opportunities related to achieving sustainability goals in various economic sectors. Discussions were guided by the overarching question of how individuals and communities can contribute to broader societal transitions while addressing systemic barriers. By involving diverse participants and fostering open dialogue, the event aimed to bridge gaps between expert knowledge and citizens' perspectives, ensuring a more inclusive approach to policymaking. The timing, just prior to European elections, further emphasised the democratic values underpinning the Assembly's purpose.

BEFORE THE EVENT: PREPARATION

TOPIC FRAMING

The Assembly was grounded in insights derived from a [webinar series on economic growth and sustainability](#), previously conducted by FUE. This six-part series had explored post-growth economics in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Experts from academia, business, and civil society organisations presented and discussed diverse perspectives on transitioning to a truly sustainable economy. The design of the Citizens' Assembly aimed to translate these complex discussions into accessible, tangible dialogues for citizens with little or no prior academic or professional exposure to economics.

Key guiding questions included:

- **What prevents individuals from adopting climate-friendly practices?**
- **Which sectors require action?**
- **Who should be responsible for driving change?**

By structuring the discussions around these questions, the organisers provided a clear framework that enabled participants to engage meaningfully with the topics, regardless of their prior knowledge. This approach also highlighted the interconnectedness of individual behaviours, systemic barriers, and policy interventions, providing a holistic view of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Amidst intense public debate in Germany concerning legislation to phase out fossil-fuel residential heating systems, it was all the more important to ensure that discussions were conducted in a neutral and non-partisan manner, despite the politically charged climate policy landscape at the time.

RECRUITMENT

The 63 participants were selected using a stratified random sampling approach, ensuring demographic diversity across criteria such as age, gender, education, and climate knowledge. This recruitment strategy ensured that the Assembly participants were representative of both urban and rural areas in Berlin and Brandenburg, allowing for a broad range of perspectives to be considered.

Participants received travel reimbursements and daily allowances. Recognising the constraints of weekday participation for working individuals, the event was organised over a weekend. By addressing logistical barriers to participation, such as financial costs and scheduling conflicts, the organisers demonstrated their commitment to inclusivity and equity. These efforts were crucial in building trust among participants and fostering a sense of shared responsibility for the outcomes of the deliberations.

Accessibility was prioritised throughout the event, with provisions for participants with disabilities, and financial support to cover participation costs. This focus on inclusivity and logistical support was instrumental in ensuring the success of the Assembly, enabling a diverse group of citizens to engage meaningfully with the topics at hand.

KNOWLEDGE PREPARATION: GROUP DELPHI

To support informed deliberation, the Citizens' Assembly was combined with and preceded by a Group Delphi, conducted online on 21–22 May 2024. This format provided an overview of the plurality of expert views on the topics under discussion, exploring areas where expert consensus exists or convergence of views can be achieved, and also those questions where differing assessments of facts, interpretations, and measures remain. Sixteen experts representing different disciplines and diverse schools of economic thought, from orthodox to heterodox, participated in the Delphi.



FACILITATORS' PREPARATION

In preparation for the Assembly, facilitators participated in a comprehensive training workshop. This focused on:

- **Deliberative Techniques:** Facilitators learned how to guide discussions on contentious topics, fostering constructive disagreement and consensus-building.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Training emphasised the importance of understanding and respecting participants' diverse backgrounds and experiences.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Facilitators were equipped with tools to address and de-escalate conflicts, ensuring a productive and harmonious environment.

DURING THE EVENT

KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

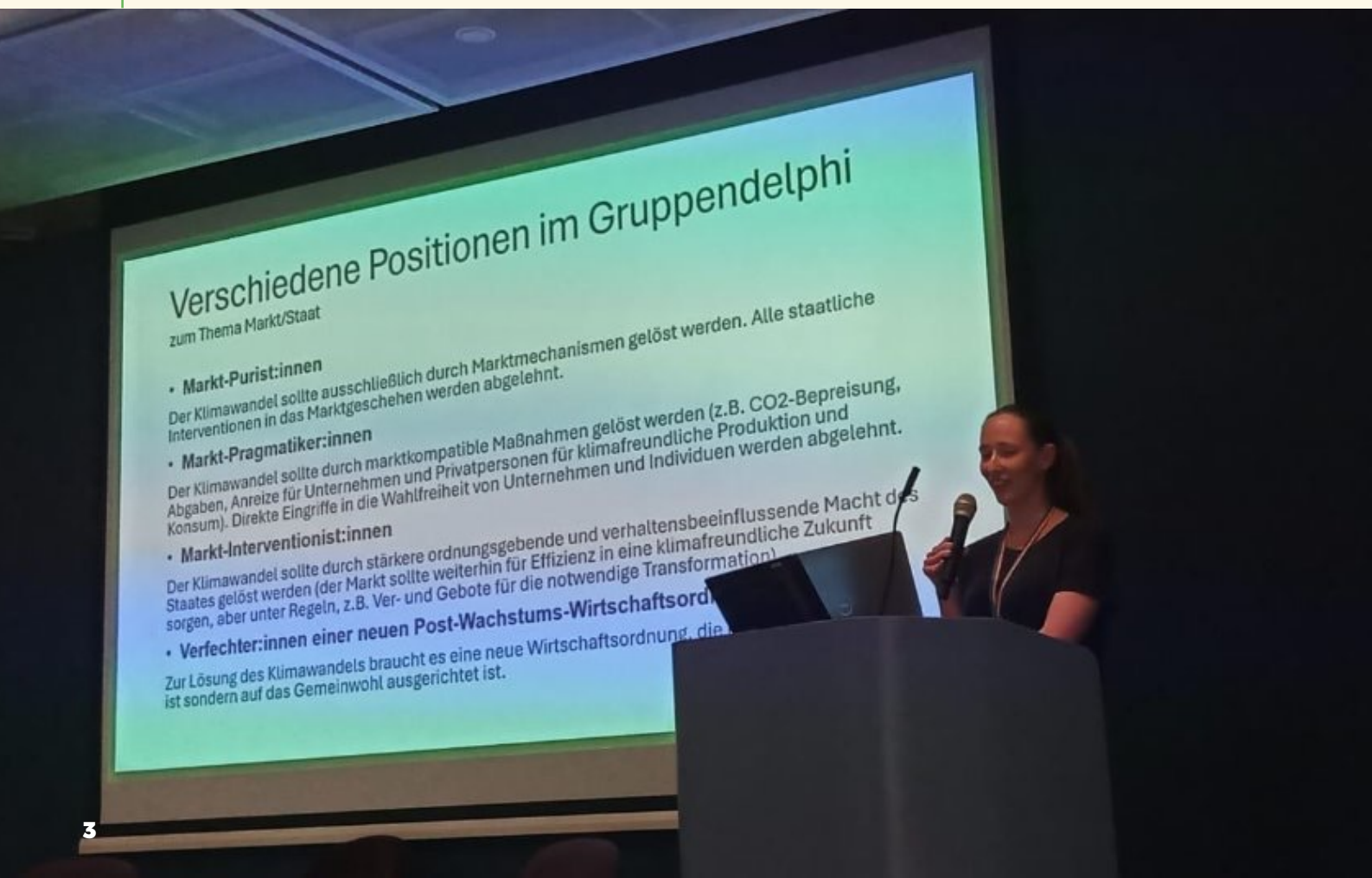
The Assembly commenced with a knowledge-sharing session led by FUE, presenting synthesised insights from the Group Delphi. Both the methodology and the findings of the Delphi were presented and explained to the participants at the event. In addition, visual summaries of the expert opinions were presented as an exhibition in the hallway.

These materials served as a foundation for the discussions, enabling participants to engage with the topics from an informed perspective.

This approach ensured that the knowledge-sharing process was accessible and engaging, allowing participants to build a strong foundation for the subsequent deliberations.

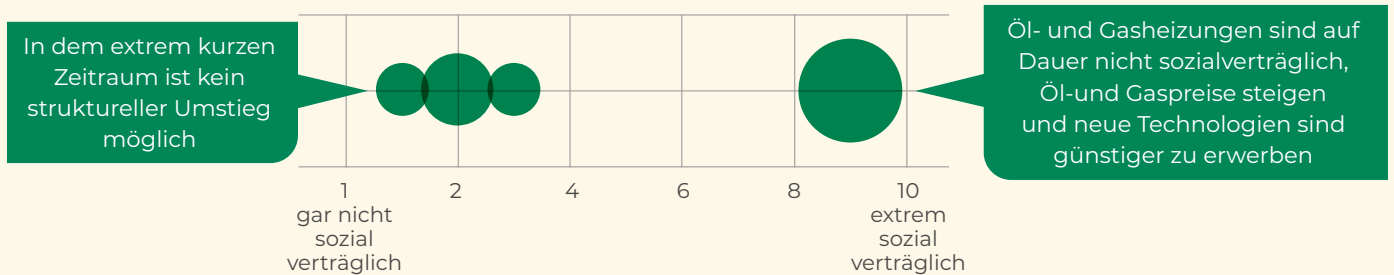
Additional materials, such as those from the [FUE webinar series](#), had been made available online to support participants in preparing for the discussions. To maintain an inclusive and non-intimidating environment, no external experts were involved during the event itself.

Presentation of the Group Delphi results in the introductory plenary



FÜR WIE SOZIALVERTRÄGLICH HALTEN SIE EIN VERBOT NEUER ÖL - UND GASHEIZUNGEN AB 2025?

Runde 1:



Example poster presenting the Group Delphi results

FACILITATION AND INTERACTION

The deliberative format alternated between plenary sessions and breakout groups, moderated by experienced facilitators who had received further training in the preparation phase.

Facilitation is a cornerstone of successful participatory processes, enabling groups to achieve common goals through structured, inclusive, and dynamic dialogue. In the context of the Citizens' Assembly, facilitation was instrumental in fostering constructive discussions, balancing power dynamics, and ensuring that all participants could contribute meaningfully.

The Assembly employed a range of participatory and facilitation methods:

- **World Café:** A structured conversational process that rotates participants through small group discussions, allowing them to explore diverse perspectives. This method was pivotal in fostering creativity and building consensus on complex issues.
- **Dot Voting:** Participants used sticky dots to prioritise policy proposals, enabling a transparent and democratic decision-making process.

- **Breakout Groups:** Smaller discussions provided a more intimate setting for participants to share insights, facilitated by trained moderators who ensured equitable speaking opportunities.
- **Written Reflections:** Before breakout group discussions, participants were encouraged to write down their thoughts, thereby reducing the influence of dominant voices and promoting thoughtful dialogue.

"I experienced a healing kind of interaction during the event."

Summarised Agenda

Time	Content
Day 1 (evening)	
120 minutes	Introduction to the Assembly and the topic
Day 2 (main day)	
40 minutes	Introduction to the day, presentation of the Group Delphi results
60 minutes	Breakout groups: Challenges of and incentives for climate-friendly behaviour
30 minutes	<i>Break</i>
45 minutes	Breakout groups: Actions required by stakeholders to promote climate-friendly behaviour among consumers
60 minutes	<i>Break</i>
120 minutes	World Café: Discussion of necessary measures regarding housing, nutrition, and mobility
30 minutes	<i>Break</i>
30 minutes	Evaluation of the proposed measures
60 minutes	Plenary discussion & closing
Day 3 (optional)	Museum visit (Futurium)

Breakout discussions adhered to pre-defined rules to ensure respectful interaction, with measures to address power imbalances, such as equal speaking time and written reflections prior to verbal contributions. Outputs from these discussions were presented during plenary sessions and clustered into thematic groups. Participants prioritised policy proposals through dot-voting exercises, enabling collective decision making on key issues.

This structured yet flexible approach allowed for a dynamic exchange of ideas, balancing individual input with collective decision making. The facilitators played a crucial role in ensuring that all voices were heard, creating a supportive environment where participants could engage constructively with complex and often contentious issues.

A World Café format was employed to rotate participants and hence explore diverse perspectives. Outputs from these discussions were clustered into thematic groups and presented during a plenary session. Participants then prioritised the various policy proposals through dot-voting exercises, enabling collective decision making on key issues.

To address power dynamics, equal speaking times were enforced, and participants used written cards for reflection before presenting ideas aloud.

SIDE-EVENTS

The event included a joint dinner, fostering informal connections among participants and enhancing the collaborative atmosphere. On the third day, participants could opt for a guided tour of [Futurium](#), an interactive Berlin exhibition space that explores the future of technology, science, and society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The German Citizens' Assembly did not intend to develop fully formulated policy recommendations; that would have required an additional day or entire weekend. Instead, the participants agreed on 10 priority areas for policy or direct action.

Top 10 Priorities

- **Environmental architecture** (23)
- **Regulating animal welfare** (18)
- **Expansion of local public transport** (16)
- **New housing models** (15)
- **Inexpensive/free local and long-distance public transport** (15)
- **Speed limits** (15)
- **Reducing packaging** (14)
- **Abolition of climate-damaging pricing policies; Creating climate-friendly financial incentives** (14)
- **Expansion of the rail network (long-distance lines)** (13)

