EU-CIEMBLY
Democracy for All

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 2 | 12 MAY 2025

RETHINKING PARTICIPATION THROUGH AN INTERSECTIONAL LENS

Intersectionality, first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), provides a vital framework for understanding how overlapping systems of discrimination and privilege affect participation in democratic life. Within citizens' assemblies, this lens helps us see how structural barriers limit the involvement of people belonging to multiple, intersecting marginalised groups. Meaningful inclusion requires more than diverse participation, it demands reimagining democratic spaces to actively address and dismantle these barriers.

The EU-CIEMBLY project responds directly to this complexity with a forward-looking approach.

Our mission is to **design models for EU citizens' assemblies that place intersectional equality, inclusion, and deliberation** at their core. To achieve this, the project explores both practical examples from past assemblies and bold theoretical approaches that imagine what inclusive democratic spaces could look like—beyond current limitations.

Building on previous research that mapped the academic landscape and established a solid analytical framework, the EU-CIEMBLY project now presents **six models** for designing more inclusive citizens' assemblies. These models are not rigid templates, but rather theoretical starting points that draw on political theory, sociology, representational theory, and democratic innovation. While some models may overlap, none claim to offer a one-size-fits-all solution; instead, they encourage experimentation and adaptation to meet the unique needs and contexts of different communities.

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> EU-CIEMBLY is advancing toward meaningful inclusion of intersectionality and inclusiveness within the realm of European democracy.
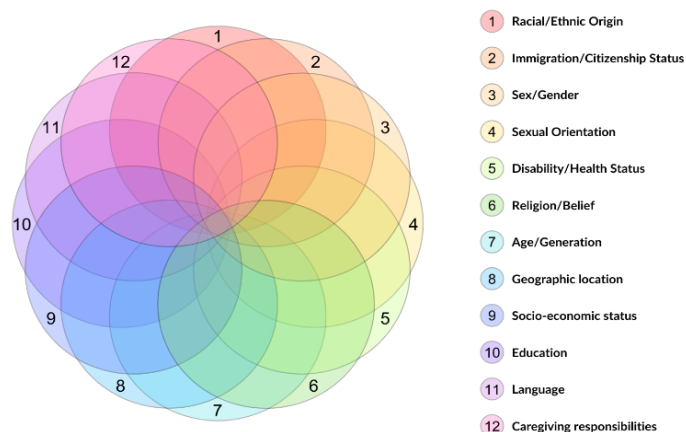
UPCOMING EVENT

In July 2025, the EU-CIEMBLY team will host an Experts' Workshop at the University of Essex, bringing together leading experts in participatory and deliberative democracy, with a focus on intersectionality in democratic processes. The event will feature presentations on EU and national Citizens' Assemblies, followed by a session where the project team will share its draft model framework for feedback.

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THE SIX THEORETICAL MODELS AT A GLANCE

The EU-CIEMBLY team developed six theoretical models aimed at advancing intersectional equality, inclusion, and deliberation within citizens' assemblies.

1. The **Descriptive Representation model** aims to include participants who represent the demographic diversity of marginalised groups, focusing on both individual groups and their intersections. Based on Hanna Pitkin's idea of "mirroring" group characteristics, it prioritises external inclusion by ensuring diverse participants are present in the assembly. This can be achieved through random sampling or quotas to represent various intersections.

2. The **Discursive Representation model** emphasises the inclusion of diverse perspectives from marginalised groups through experienced advocates, often nominated by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). It combines random selection with targeted recruitment, fostering intersectional inclusion.

3. The **Subaltern Counterpublics model**, based on Nancy Fraser's concept, offers marginalised groups a dedicated space to deliberate without pressure from dominant opinions. It ensures that participants can express their concerns and perspectives freely, promoting inclusion in decision-making processes. Participants can form counterpublics organically, based on self-identification rather than imposed categories, reducing risks of stereotyping.

4. The **Power Sharing model** empowers marginalised groups by giving them control over citizens' assemblies, ensuring they shape the process, agenda, and representation. It focuses on community-led, intersectional inclusion, and aims to reduce power imbalances.

5. The **Agonistic Pluralism model**, influenced by Chantal Mouffe, values democratic engagement through open conflict and difference rather than consensus. It encourages passionate political debate, recognising that democracy is strengthened by the visibility of power and antagonism. It supports diverse and dynamic deliberation processes, allowing participants to defend their perspectives while considering opposing views.

6. The **Relationality and Interdependence model** highlights interconnectedness, drawing from indigenous, feminist, and environmental theories. It focuses on trust-building through informal interactions, trauma-informed facilitation and shared values to foster inclusive and respectful deliberation.

An example visual representation of intersecting identities to be considered in sampling for an intersectional citizens' assembly aimed at descriptive representation.

1. Racial/Ethnic Origin
2. Immigration/Citizenship Status
3. Sex/Gender
4. Sexual Orientation
5. Disability/Health Status
6. Religion/Belief
7. Age/Generation
8. Geographic location
9. Socio-economic status
10. Education
11. Language
12. Caregiving responsibilities

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Source: The research teams' elaboration based on Duckworth (2020).