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# The Recruitment of Participants in Polish Citizens' Panels and the Effectiveness of the Methods Used: The Results of First Observations

**Abstract**

*Objective*: Citizens' panels have been organised in Polish cities since 2016. By 2024, thirteen such processes had been conducted. The research material they provide can be analysed on the grounds of various scientific disciplines, including, among others, management and quality sciences.

*Research Design & Methods*: This research paper is an attempt to assess the effectiveness of the recruitment of participants in citizens' panels, which, according to this deliberative method, are supposed to ensure the representativeness and diversity of residents' views.

*Findings*: The case study carried out showed that in only three citizens' panels, the number of registrations was between 6% and 9.9% of the invitations sent out. By contrast, in the remaining cases, the number of those interested in taking part in a citizens' panel oscillated between 1.87% and 5.05%.

*Keywords*: public governance, deliberation, citizen's panels in Poland, mini-publics, representativeness of citizens' panels

*Article classification*: research results

*JEL classification*: H83

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## Introduction

The evolution of paradigms in public management, with the approach to the importance of the role of residents, i.e. from a passive role to an active role, has fostered a growing interest in the subject of public consultation in the fields of management and quality sciences (Rożnowska et al., 2022). In addition, since the 1980s, theoretical and practical work has been undertaken on the implementation of new participatory methods that could improve the quality of consultations. One of them is the inclusion of deliberative methods in the processes of co-creating public value (Juchacz, 2007).

Research on deliberative processes, especially on the Polish ground, is only at the initial stage. This is due to the fact that it has been used regularly only since 2016. This is also influenced by the fact that Poland has seen an approximately twenty-year shift interest in this area due to the systemic transformation after 1989 (Kożuch, 2005). Therefore, the research material that previous research provides can be an "interesting and instructive case study" for further implementations (Ufel, 2022, p. 97). This is also how the purpose of this publication – namely observations of one of the first stages of organising citizens' panels, i.e. the recruitment of participants – should be interpreted.

At the outset, it should be noted that the recruitment of panellists constitutes the essence of this participatory process (Ufel, 2022, p. 99), which thus acquires the characteristics of a deliberative process. This is because the aim of recruiting participants is to create a mini-public, a 'city in a nutshell', and by drawing lots, the aspiration to ensure representativeness is fulfilled. Focusing on this passage led to the formulation of the research problem: what is the effectiveness of the methods used so far to recruit participants for citizens' panels in Poland?

Due to the ambiguity of the terms (Głodziński, 2015; Mazurkiewicz, 2012), for the purposes of this study, effectiveness is assumed to be the relationship between the inputs involved (Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2012, p. 26) (in this case: organisational, financial, logistical, etc.) and the results achieved. In the literature (Spada & Peixoto, 2025), the number of registrations in response to the invitations sent is also referred to as the 'acceptance rate', but it is used in the context of research on the representativeness and legitimacy of the outputs of mini-publics. Given that the focus of this research is to embed the issue of citizens' panels in management and quality sciences – as an indicator to assess the effects achieved – the level of effectiveness was adopted. The 'acceptance rate' – or, in the case of the terms used in this study, the 'registration rate' – is an element that makes up the evaluation of the effectiveness of the process. The research problem thus presented led to the formulation of research questions:

1. How did cities in Poland recruit deliberation participants?
2. What is the observed relationship between the way the participants are recruited and the level of recruitment success?

Analysed were thirteen deliberative processes in the form of citizens' panels held in Polish cities since 2016 – Gdańsk, Lublin, Wrocław, Poznań, Łódź, Warsaw, Kraków, and Rzeszów – as well as in the Upper Silesian Metropolis. The research method used was a case study by analysing data that was included in reports or materials summarising the processes carried out.

## Public participation processes

The erosion and scarcity of democratic procedures in involving stakeholders in the co-creation of public values has fostered the development and diffusion of innovative participatory

methods (Brandsen & Verschuere, 2018, p. 25). In this sense, it should be understood that public participation is the manifestation of the collective participation and involvement of citizens in the process of shaping public policies (OECD, 2017). The ladder of public participation most often cited for several decades, published in 1969 by Sherry Phyllis Arnstein (1969), presents eight levels of participation – from non-participatory activities through symbolic participation to actual partnership and co-governance (Kotus et al., 2019, p. 35). Nevertheless, following OECD recommendations, this ladder can be brought down to three levels of participation: 1. unilaterally *informing* the residents by the public authority about the actions taken; 2. *consulting*; and 3. *involving* citizens in the public policymaking process by providing them with the necessary resources to do so (OECD, 2017).

One of the innovative methods to engage citizens in the co-creation of public value includes deliberative techniques. They have been used worldwide since 1979. The OECD has identified more than 700 processes using them by 2023 (OECD Deliberative Democracy Database, 2023). Deliberative techniques are an implementation of the tenets of deliberative democratic theory, aimed at involving citizens in the process of solving problems of importance to the community by conducting a fair (*impartiality*) discourse, respecting the dissent of opinions (*intersubjectivity*), the equality of the participants in the process (*inclusivity*), oriented towards achieving the common good (The Common Good, 2018) through guided agreements (*consensus*) (Mendonça & Asenbaum, 2025, p. 4). A key characteristic of deliberative techniques is the creation of a space for public reflection (Fishkin, 1991). A key element is, therefore, to base the whole process on:

– the reliability of knowledge and educational stage (Fishkin, 2011, pp. 33–34),
– creating a representative mini-public (Carson & Hart, 2005, p. 4),
– carrying out public reflection (deliberation) (Gastil, 2000, p. 22).

In this sense, deliberative techniques represent a qualitative change from public consultations conducted according to traditional methods and reduce the risks associated with the use of classic procedures (Juchacz, 2007).

These risks on the Polish ground were, among others, diagnosed in a report by the Supreme Chamber of Control (NIK, 2019). Its conclusion was that consultations are characterised by a chaotic process and hostility between the participants who lobby for their interests (NIK, 2019). They therefore represented the opposite of what deliberation seeks, namely education, reflection, opinion-formation, and the development of shared recommendations. Moreover over the last several years, one can observe an increasing interest in public consultation and the various methods of conducting it in the field of management and quality sciences. On the basis of a bibliometric analysis of scientific articles on public consultation in this scientific discipline (Rożnowska et al., 2022, pp. 87–88), one can distinguish four thematic clusters, one of which deals directly with issues of deliberative democracy. The other highlighted clusters are: 1. problematics directly related to public consultation; 2. problematics related to community involvement in consultation processes; and 3. issues related to interest groups. The thematic clusters are shown in Figure 1.

Moving on to explain the specifics of deliberative processes, it should be noted that one of the most important elements that most often constitute the difference between a deliberative process and a traditional public consultation is precisely the process of participant recruitment. It is not accidental. The deliberative process will not involve "everyone off the street", but "potentially everyone drawn from the street", creating a mini-public, something that already appears in the works of Robert Dahl (Spada & Peixoto, 2025, p. 138). The drawing of participants

(referred to as panellists) is, therefore, a key element (Podgórska-Rykała, 2020, pp. 38–41) of the process design that must precede:

1. a demographic analysis of the local community and an estimation of representativeness – these characteristics can be supplemented by additional criteria, referring to the theme of the panel;
2. the choice of method for recruiting participants – on the Polish ground, two directions have been structured: 1. by sending invitations to register (the most commonly used) and a double draw (for registration and after registration), or 2. opening recruitment and a single draw (after registration).

**Figure 1.** Issues of research on public consultation in management and quality sciences

Source: Rożnowska et al., 2022.

The intention of deliberative procedures is to ensure representativeness and impartiality through a draw of lots (Carson & Hart, 2005, pp. 3–4). However, the draw is not clearly interpreted to recognise deliberation as meeting the requirements of public consultation; it is about limiting the universality of participation[1].

Contemporary deliberative techniques are deployed in relation to theoretical assumptions from political science (Dahl, 1990; Dewey, 1954; Habermas, 2015; Rawls, 1999). They are developed and adapted in practice taking into account other community-specific characteristics. In order to capture the importance of the participant recruitment process, which is the subject of this discussion, the following is presented as a blueprint for the conduct of citizens' panels,

[1] A similar challenge has also been faced in Poland, as can be seen in the case study on citizens' panels in Łódź. The scholars and practitioners of deliberation also provide interpretations on the interpretation of the current data protection legislation and the possibility of using it in a draw. Cf. Podgórska-Rykała, 2020, pp. 22–26.

which has been developed from publications that are instructional in nature (Podgórska-Rykała, 2020; Gerwin, 2018).

**Table 1.** The outline diagram of the course of civic panels including sample activities

| Phase | Action | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Phase 1: Decision | internal or bottom-up initiative | • managing the organisation of the process;<br>• choosing a contractor – selection procedure: competition or public procurement |
| Phase 2: Commissioning | selecting an independent operator | • providing the materials needed to design the process |
| Phase 3: The recruitment of residents | choosing a method: mailing invitations and two-stage draw, or open registration and one-stage draw | • defining demographic parameters and methodology;<br>• selecting IT tools for conducting the draw |
| Phase 3a: The recruitment of other participants | defining rules for recruitment: experts, parties, monitoring committee, observers | • recruiting experts appearing in the educational part;<br>• recruiting parties – informal groups, NGOs, or institutions that cannot be granted the expert status due to their lobbying nature;<br>• recruiting a monitoring committee – individuals or institutions whose role is to ensure transparency and integrity;<br>• recruiting observers – participatory practitioners and academics |
| Phase 4: Preparation for deliberation | substantive and technical/ organisational | • preparing materials for the educational part;<br>• ensuring appropriate conditions at the deliberation site |
| Phase 5: The proper process | deliberating | • implementing the relevant part of the process; |
| Phase 6: Completion | adopting recommendations | • the form of a ceremonial handover of recommendations |
| Phase 7: The implementation of recommendations | publishing and updating | • publishing on a website or in other publicly accessible place, and regularly updating the status of the implementation |

Source: Own elaboration based on: Podgórska-Rykała, 2020.

The presented outline is at a high level of generality and the final two phases of the whole process are only briefly mentioned, as the research problem is primarily concerned with the third phase related to the recruitment of participants.

For the sake of argument, it should be added that literature identifies various forms of deliberative processes, which are used at the local and/or state level. In addition to civic panels, which are most commonly used in Poland, deliberative polls, citizen courts, planning cells, consensus conferences, and citizen reviews of initiatives (Podgórska-Rykała, 2020, p. 2; Ufel, 2022, p. 99) should also be distinguished.

Nevertheless, in recent years, one can observe emerging publications critically analysing the techniques used so far, such as the issues of the representativeness of mini-publications (Spada & Peixoto, 2025, pp. 96–97) and the very means of recruiting participants in deliberative processes (Ufel, 2024, pp. 167–184). Therefore, participation practitioners are beginning to formulate demands for the organisation of "smaller and cheaper" (Ufel, 2024, p. 179) deliberations to make them financially achievable for less well-off local governments. Examples of such smaller deliberative forms would be, for example, citizen deliberations or deliberative cafés (Gerwin, 2023). Both of these techniques involve sending out invitations in numbers oscillating on the scale of 2,000–3,000 or more (Gerwin, 2023, p. 15), depending on the size of the community.

## Research methods

Data identification was done using the case study methodology. The conducted research was exploratory in nature (Glinka & Czakon, 2021, p. 56) due to an attempt to observe how the choice of a method for recruiting civic panel participants influenced the effectiveness rate, which is a contribution to further research in this area (Pizło, 2009, p. 248). Given the subject of the research (thirteen citizens' panels in Poland), the proposed case study took the form of a multiple case study (Glinka & Czakon, 2021, p. 56). The rationale behind the use of this empirical method – according to its definition – is to subject a contemporary phenomenon to testing, taking into account its proper context and the multiplicity of variables which condition it (Yin, 2009, p. 18). The adopted procedure was the inductive case study procedure, the outline of which is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** A general scheme of the case study procedure, including the subject of this study

| Procedure to be followed | Subject of this study |
|---|---|
| 1. Formulating the research question | How effective are the methods used so far to recruit citizens' panellists in Poland?<br>• How did cities in Poland recruit deliberation participants?<br>• What is the observed relationship between the way the participants are recruited and the level of recruitment success? |
| 2. Selecting cases | 13 civic panels implemented in Polish cities and the metropolitan association in 2016–2024 |
| 3. Developing data collection tools | identifying websites where materials have been published that contain the data needed to carry out this study |
| 4. Conducting field research | conducting a review of research sources |
| 5. Data analysis | analysing and collating the collected data |
| 6. Forming generalisations | developing a performance indicator and evaluating the level of success in recruiting participants to the Polish citizens' panels |
| 7. Confronting the literature | confronting the literature |
| 8. Closing the research – generalisations | drawing conclusions from the study |

Source: Czakon (2006, p. 10) as well as own study.

By using this method, it was possible to obtain information on the course of the individual citizens' panels and to organise it, as it is scattered in various source materials. This resulted in a set of standardised data, which was then compared.

In the course of the research, significant were the reports summarising the deliberative processes or, in the absence of the inclusion of such data in the reports, the analysis of the available information material that was published on the websites of the town halls where the citizens' panels took place or on the websites of the operators who carried out the process on behalf of the town. To characterise the individual citizens' panels in relation to the presented research problem, the scope has been narrowed down to the following data:

- the city;
- the date of the panel (excluding the preparatory and post-panel periods), including the impact of the period of the panel on the type of panel formula (remote or on-site);
- demographic criteria;
- the type of recruitment (postal or open);
- the number of invitations sent;
- the number of people registered in response to calls;
- additional insights that distinguish the conducted panel.

The focal data used for further comparison and estimation of the level of effectiveness included: 1. the city; 2. the chosen method of recruiting trial participants; 3. the number of invitations sent; and 4. the number of registrations. Other information – concerning the duration of the deliberation with characteristics of the period when it took place as well as additional insights – is supplementary. For the purposes of this research, only cities where the citizens' panel technique was used were analysed, as this is the technique most commonly used in Poland to date. This means that the research excluded one case from Poznań[2].

## Findings

The proposed research methods and the described data collection procedure, were used to identify the most important information regarding the citizens' panels that were conducted in eight Polish cities and a metropolitan association between 2016 and 2024. In three of the nine cases, citizens' panels have been held more than once; in the others, they have been held once so far.

### *Gdańsk*

In Gdańsk, citizens' panels have been conducted three times. Gdańsk is also the first city in Poland to use this participatory technique. The first citizens' panel took place from 19 November to 3 December 2016. The following were chosen as demographic criteria to reflect the structure of the city: gender, age, education, inhabited neighbourhood. This translated into the decision to make 63 participants in the first panel and 2 people in the reserve group. Invitations, in the form of traditional letters, were sent to a random selection of 8,969 addresses (Gdańsk, 2017a, pp. 10–11). In response to the invitations, 896 people registered.

The second citizens' panel took place from 25 March to 19 April 2017. As with the first panel, the demographic criteria chosen were: gender, age, education, neighbourhood. It was decided that the composition of the second panel would be 56 people plus 8 people in the reserve group. Invitations by letter were sent to 9,042 randomly selected addresses. A return response,

[2] Poznań is the first and so far only Polish city where two deliberative techniques have been used. A deliberative opinion poll was carried out there in 2009, while the First Poznań Citizens' Panel was conducted in 2021.

together with consent for further participation in the draw, was submitted by 899 people (Gdańsk, 2017b, pp. 13–14).

The third Gdańsk Citizens' Panel took place from 16 September to 21 October 2018. The same demographic criteria were also applied this time. The number of panellists – the same as during the second panel – was 56 in the main panel and 8 in the reserve panel. Invitations, in the form of letters, were sent to 9,987 people and a response was received from 447 people (Gdańsk, 2018, pp. 10–11).

*Lublin*

The Lublin civic panel was chronologically the third Polish civic panel and took place from 7 April to 21 April 2018. Invitations, by letter, were sent to 12,000 randomly selected addresses (Lublin, 2018c). Gender, age, and neighbourhood were chosen as demographic criteria. The size of the panel was set at 60 participants plus 12 people in the reserve group, who accounted for 20% of the core membership. The total of 752 people responded to the invitations (Lublin, 2018a)[3].

*Łódź*

Two citizens' panels have been organised in Łódź. The first one took place in 2020 and was inaugurated on 7 March, i.e. several days before the introduction of the epidemic emergency and restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Association of Entrepreneurs and Employers, 2021, p. 3). This meant that it was necessary to change the formula for running the panel to a remote form – the panel ran until 18 July 2020. So far, the Łódź Citizens' Panel is the only panel in Poland where it was decided not to send invitations by post. This decision was justified by a legal opinion stating that the citizens' panel cannot be considered as an equal form of public consultation, because by drawing lots of participants in the first stage of recruitment, the possibility of general participation is limited[4]. Nevertheless, a random draw was conducted at the second stage of recruitment. The demographic criteria included gender, education, and the fact of living in Łódź. The composition was 67 people in the core group and 6 people in the reserve group. As a result of the information and promotional activities carried out, 1,068 people volunteered to participate in the first Łódź Citizens' Panel (Łódź, 2023a)[5]. The second Łódź Citizens' Panel took place between 11 March and 22 April 2023. Compared to its first iteration, it was held in the stationary format, and the recruitment of the participants

[3] This information was not published in the draw materials. It was obtained from the video report of the draw of participants.

[4] The citizens' panel constitutes a form of participation (selected in a specific procedure, with a numerically defined representation) of the inhabitants of Łódź in the decision-making process by the Łódź City Council bodies other than public consultations. This element – i.e. the bureaucratic limitation of the number of persons who may participate in the consultations – nullifies the possibility of recognising the panel as a form of social consultations as referred to in the aforementioned provision of Article 5a of the Act on Municipal Self-Government, according to which social consultations are held with the residents of a municipality. Cf. Position of the City Council of Łódź on the proper legal form for holding a citizens' panel and the possibility to use data from the voters' register or the population register for the purposes of inviting residents to participate in the panel, p. 3 (https://uml.lodz.pl/files/public/uploads/panel_obywatelski/formalne/Stanowisko_panel_obywatelski.pdf [accessed: 22.02.2025].

[5] As in the case of the Lublin panel, the number of people registered was not recorded in the summary report; this data was obtained after analysing the video documentation of the draw of panel participants.

was carried out according to the same principles, i.e. with open registration at the first stage. The panel consisted of 60 people in the core group and 10 people in the reserve group. Fewer people – i.e. 842 – were willing to participate, but 25 of them did not meet the formal requirements, so, eventually, 817 people were admitted to the draw (Łódź, 2023b)[6].

*Wrocław*

The Wrocław civic panel took place from 3 September to 3 October 2020, meaning that it lasted during the constraints of the pandemic (Association of Entrepreneurs and Employers, 2021, p. 7). The mobility themes of the panel influenced the selection criteria for the panel composition; demographic criteria were supplemented by the most commonly used mode of transport (Wrocław, 2020, p. 8). The panel was made up of 75 people and 10 people constituting the reserve group. Invitations were sent in the form of traditional letters to a group of 20,000 randomly selected addresses, of which 825 people (Wrocław, 2020, pp. 13–14) expressed a wish to participate in the second draw.

*Warsaw*

The citizens' panel was held under the name 'Warsaw Climate Panel' and lasted from 3 November to 28 November 2020 (Warsaw, 2021, p. 17). Due to the tightening of restrictions related to the sanitary-epidemiological regime after 17 October 2020, it was held entirely remotely (Warsaw, 2021, p. 17). The panel size was planned to be 80 people in the main group and 10 people in the reserve group. Invitations were sent to 18,000 households, and the demographic criteria taken into account in drawing these addresses included – as in the previously discussed panels – age, gender, education, and the district of residence. To the invitations sent this way, 337 people responded (Warsaw, 2021, p. 43)[7]. An additional note is that the initiative to hold the Warsaw panel was bottom-up (Warsaw, 2021, p. 5), i.e. the decision to hold it was made on the basis of a motion submitted to the Mayor of the Capital City of Warsaw concerning public consultations using deliberation. The application met the formal requirements set out in the city's resolutions on ordering public consultations; the application was supported by the signatures of 1,000 people with active voting rights[8].

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[6] Compared to the first edition, information on the effects of participant recruitment was presented in the Summary Report of the 2nd Łódź Civic Panel.

[7] This result was also commented on in the implementation report, because with a planned participation of 90 people (80 in the main group and 10 in the reserve group), the registration of 337 people could not adequately ensure that the postulate of representativeness was met, but, as the operators assured, owing to the methods used, it was possible to get closer to the optimal composition.

[8] The requirement to support an initiative for public consultation applies in Warsaw on the basis of a city council resolution. Currently, it is at least 200 persons with active voting rights or 15 non-governmental organisations. Cf. Resolution No. LXI/1691/2013 of the City Council of the Capital City of Warsaw of 11 July 2013 on the principles and mode of conducting consultations with the residents of the Capital City of Warsaw (Dz. Urz. Woj. Maz. z 2013 r. Poz. 8442), taking into account amendments introduced by Resolution No. LXIII/2076/2022 of the Council of the Capital City of Warsaw of 7 April 2022 (Urz. Woj. Maz. of 2022, Item. 4668) as well as Resolution No. LXVII/2222/2022 of the Council of the Capital City of Warsaw of 7 July 2022 (Urz. Woj. Maz. of 2022, Item. 7718), §4, para. 14, para. 2 sub-paragraph c). See: https://konsultacje.um.warszawa.pl/baza-wiedzy#uchwala-z-11-lipca-2013-konsultacje-z-mieszkancami [accessed: 23.02.2025].

*Kraków*

Two citizens' panels have so far been organised in Kraków. The first panel took place from 10 April to 12 June 2021 and, due to ongoing epidemiological restrictions, was held in the remote (Kraków, 2021b)[9] format. The demographic criteria that were taken into account included gender, age, education, and neighbourhood. The composition of the panel was set at 60 people plus 10 people in the reserve group. Invitations in the form of letters were sent out in the number of 20,000, out of which 580 registration applications were received, but due to formal requirements, 564 persons were admitted to further proceedings (Kraków, 2021c)[10]. During the second panel, deliberative meetings took place between 4 March and 28 April 2023 (Warsaw, 2023, pp. 26–31). Compared to the first Kraków panel, the second one was held in the stationary format (organised after the pandemic); the researchers decided to increase the number of panel participants in the core group to 70 people while maintaining a 10-person reserve group; 4,000 fewer invitations were sent, bringing the number to 16,000 in 2023; the demographic criteria remained the same (age, gender, education, neighbourhood) (Warsaw, 2023, pp. 23–24). In total, 401 people expressed interest in taking part in this citizens' panel.

*Poznań*

As already mentioned, Poznań was the first city in Poland where two different deliberative techniques were used. The citizens' panel took place from 18 February to 22 May 2021. The methodology adopted for the selection of panellists set the size of the panel at 65 people plus 10 people in reserve. Invitations were sent to just under 20,000 households, out of which a response was received from 1,009 people. The demographic criteria taken into account included gender, age, neighbourhood, education. and – given the topic of the panel – attitudes to climate change (Poznań, 2021)[11].

*Rzeszów*

The citizens' panel was held under the name of the Rzeszów Climate Panel and lasted from 21 October to 18 November 2023. Its size was 50 people in the core group and 10 people in the reserve group. The researchers decided to recruit the participants by sending letter invitations to 10,000 households selected in the first stage of the draw. In total, 231 positive responses were received (Rzeszów, 2023, p. 18).

[9] The Rules of Procedure of the Kraków Climate Panel: https://ipp.expert/kpk/ [accessed: 23.02.2025].

[10] For the results of the draw of the Panelists of the Kraków Climate Panel, see: https://ipp.expert/kpk/panelistki-i-panelisci/ [accessed: 23.02.2025].

[11] See: Poznań, 2021 (available at: https://www.poznan.pl/mim/main/raport-metodologia,p,51691,60264.html?wo_id=344 [accessed: 26.02.2025]).

*The Upper Silesian and Zagłębie Metropolis – the Bytom and Katowice sub-region*[12]

The civic panel, which was conducted by the Upper Silesian and Zagłębie Metropolis[13], was the first local Polish civic panel to cover more than one city. It was conducted among the inhabitants of the so-called Bytom subregion and part of the Katowice subregion, and concerned seven communes and cities: Bytom, Chorzów, Piekary Śląskie, Radzionków, the Świerklaniec commune, Tarnowskie Góry, and two districts of Zabrze, namely Rokitnica and Helenka (GZM, 2024b). The panel, called the Civic Forum, took place from 5 October to 26 October 2024. The indication of the random sample size was done according to the criteria of: residence, gender, age, the number of children under the age of 18 who are in the person's care, the most frequent way of moving around the metropolitan area, and education (GZM, 2024a)[14]. On the basis of the analyses carried out this way, the researchers decided to send out 4,000 invitations (GZM, 2024c), to which 89 people responded, but 84 people were qualified for the second draw (GZM, 2024e). Eventually, the panel included 42 persons in the core group and 6 persons in the reserve group.

## The level of the effectiveness of the recruitment methods used

The data presented above allowed us to collate them and calculate the level of the effectiveness of the methods used to recruit participants to the thirteen citizens' panels conducted in Poland between 2016 and 2024. The effectiveness was calculated based on the ratio: the number of registrations received / the number of invitations sent x 100. The results are shown in Table 3.

The obtained results allowed for an assessment of effectiveness to be proposed. This evaluation was carried out separately for the number of applications received and for the level of effectiveness achieved (registration rate). For the purposes of this study, the assessment was adopted:

- for the number of applications received:
  - high (up arrow): for the number of entries above 800,
  - moderate (horizontal line): for the range 500–799 notifications,
  - low (down arrow): for the number of applications below 500;
- for the level of performance achieved:
  - high (upward arrow): above 6,
  - moderate (horizontal line): range from 2.99 to 5.99,
  - low (down arrow): below 2.99.

  Using the assumptions made this way, the following regularities can be observed:
- In two cases, a high number of applications and a high level of success were achieved, namely in Gdańsk in 2016 and in Gdańsk in 2017.
- In nine cases (excluding Łódź), there is an apparent difference in the assessment of the number of notifications received versus the assessment of the level of effectiveness.

[12] The summary report of the conducted panel has not yet been published. The data collected comes from information made available so far on the website of the organiser and the process operator.

[13] The metropolitan association in the Silesian Voivodeship is so far the only association of municipalities sanctioned by law; cf. Dz.U. 2025 item 186.

[14] § 23 of the Rules of Procedure of the GZM Civic Forum, paras. 1–6, id (GZM, 2024d). However, due to an insufficient number of applications, some of the criteria were dropped in the second draw, as their representativeness could not be ensured. Cf. video of the rebroadcast of the second draw of the GZM Civic Forum: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clKB6X7vMoM [accessed: 23.02.2025].

– In two cases, the level of the number of notifications obtained was lower than the effectiveness score achieved, namely in Gdańsk in 2018 (a low number of notifications, a moderate level of effectiveness) and in Lublin in 2018 (a moderate number of notifications, a high level of effectiveness).
– Out of thirteen deliberative processes: three received a high evaluation of effectiveness (in Gdańsk in 2016, in Gdańsk in 2017, and in Lublin in 2018); three received a moderate level (in Gdańsk in 2018, in Wrocław in 2020, and in Poznań in 2021); five reached a low level (in Warsaw in 2020, in Kraków in 2020, in Kraków in 2023, in Rzeszów in 2023, and in GZM in 2024); and two were not included in the evaluation scale due to a different method of participant recruitment and a lack of mailing invitations (in Łódź in 2020 and in Łódź in 2023).
– In both cases of Łódź, where the researchers did not opt for the double draw procedure and the sending of invitations, a high number of applications for participation according to the adopted evaluation scale was obtained.

**Table 3.** A summary of Polish citizens' panels, taking into account the method of recruiting participants in the form of sending invitations by snail mail or through an open recruitment of participants in relation to the number of applications received as well as an assessment of the level of the effectiveness of recruiting citizens' panels' participants

| Year | City | The number of invitations | The number of registrations | The number of participants | The number of reserves | Effectiveness |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2016 | Gdańsk | 8,969 | ↑ 896 | 63 | 4 | ↑ 9,99 |
| 2017 | Gdańsk | 9,042 | ↑ 899 | 56 | 8 | ↑ 9,94 |
| 2018 | Gdańsk | 9,987 | ↓ 447 | 56 | 8 | − 4,48 |
| 2018 | Lublin | 12,000 | − 752 | 60 | 12 | ↑ 6,27 |
| 2020 | Wrocław | 20,000 | ↑ 825 | 75 | 10 | − 4,13 |
| 2020 | Łódź | 0 | ↑ 1,068 | 67 | 6 | n.d. |
| 2020 | Warsaw | 18,000 | ↓ 337 | 80 | 10 | ↓ 1,87 |
| 2021 | Kraków | 20,000 | − 564 | 60 | 10 | ↓ 2,82 |
| 2021 | Poznań | 19,962 | ↑ 1,009 | 65 | 10 | − 5,05 |
| 2023 | Łódź | 0 | ↑ 817 | 60 | 10 | n.d. |
| 2023 | Kraków | 16,000 | ↓ 401 | 70 | 10 | ↓ 2,51 |
| 2023 | Rzeszów | 10,000 | ↓ 231 | 50 | 10 | ↓ 2,31 |
| 2024 | GZM | 4,000 | ↓ 84 | 43 | 6 | ↓ 2,10 |

Source: Own study.

## Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this article was to analyse thirteen Polish deliberative processes in the form of citizens' panels that were conducted in Polish cities between 2016 and 2024 in the context of the effectiveness of recruiting participants to these processes. As indicated in the introduction,

these considerations should be treated as another contribution to further discussion and research on deliberative participatory techniques in Polish local governments.

The author is aware of the research limitations when it comes to fully assessing the effectiveness of the recruitment of citizens' panels' participants, given only the fragmentary data presented in this paper. Therefore, the considerations in this area will be continued and complemented by, among other things, identifying all tools applied during the recruitment of participants, together with an indication of their role (leading, relevant, complementary, reinforcing) as well as the identification and comparison of the costs of panellist recruitment itself in relation to the total cost of organising a civic panel in a given city. This will also make it possible to direct further research towards the evaluation of the organisational and qualitative effectiveness of deliberative methods in Poland as well as to formulate implementation postulates.

Nevertheless, summarising the work carried out so far, it should be stated that the recruitment of deliberative participants and the choice of how to conduct it constitutes the essence of the deliberative process and differentiates it from public consultations using traditional methods.

Polish cities in most cases (11 out of 13) decided to recruit participants for civic panels using closed recruitment and a double draw, i.e. by sending invitations to households drawn in the first stage of recruitment and then drawing a group of participants from a pool of received registrations. Only one city, where two civic panels have been conducted so far (Łódź), decided to openly recruit participants and then draw panel participants from the pool of registrations received.

The analysis shows that the majority of deliberative processes (5 out of 11) received a low score on the level of effectiveness, with 4 of them also receiving a low score in terms of the number of applications received. A decrease in the level of the effectiveness of the recruitment has been observed since 2020, and the lowest score was achieved in Warsaw in 2023, where the organisation of the citizens' panel was a bottom-up initiative, proposed by a group of social activists and supported by the required number of signatures of residents. In the case of the third civic panel in Gdańsk, there is a clear difference between the number of applications received and the number of applications received in the previous two processes (almost half as many people applied to the third panel as to the previous two, despite the fact that almost a thousand more invitations were sent out).

Łódź was outside the scale of efficiency assessment due to a different way of recruiting participants. Nevertheless, this is why the city achieved a high number of registrations received, and in the case of the 2020 panel, this was the highest result compared to other processes in Poland. Apart from Łódź, four other civic panels received a number of registrations above 800 (in Gdańsk in 2016 and 2017; in Wrocław in 2020, and in Poznań in 2021). However, in these cases, it was preceded by a more complex organisational procedure involving the mailing of several thousand invitations on average.

Taking these results into account, it would be going too far to draw a conclusion at this stage about the low effectiveness of the recruitment of participants for Polish citizens' panels due to the difficulty in indicating a clear regularity between the chosen recruitment method and the number of applications received. The difference between the Łódź 2020 panel's result and the Poznań panels' results (sending almost 20,000 invitations) is not visible enough (the difference is exactly 59 applications) to consider the open recruitment of participants as a more effective way. This means, however, that the phenomena that influence this are multifaceted, and space is seen for further and interdisciplinary research in this respect, e.g. by analysing the degree of the involvement of residents in participatory procedures in individual cities, if one assumes that the way in which deliberation participants are recruited does not influence the achieved number of applications.

What is interesting in this respect is the case of Poznań, where the topic of deliberation in the form of a citizens' panel returned twelve years after the first deliberative opinion poll in Poland, and where the second best registration result for the citizens' panel was obtained. In Kraków, a comparable number of invitations were sent out, but there were almost half as many registrations.

Nevertheless, the observed regularities may lead to raising further research questions: if the level of effectiveness is comparable irrespective of the choice of the method of recruiting citizens' panel participants, how do they translate into: the cost-effectiveness of the processes conducted; the representativeness (and thus the legitimacy of the developed recommendations) of the drawn mini-public, or the boundary assumptions of deliberative procedures?

It should be added that the level of registration achieved in Poland after invitations had been sent out is close to that achieved abroad; according to current research, the rate is around 5%, although there are countries where the rate is 44%[15].

The analysis proposed in this article in terms of the organisational effectiveness of citizens' panels is a new look at this issue, which is also due to the fact that the research subject itself is young and has only provided research material since 2016.

So far in Poland, research in this field is mainly conducted in political science, law, and sociology. Thus, the scope of the research conducted relates, among other things, to: the evaluation of deliberative processes by decision-makers, which aims to capture the difference between 'academic' deliberation and deliberation 'in use' (Podgórska-Rykała, 2024); the evaluation of deliberative processes by residents (Paulis & Pospieszna, 2024; Pospieszna, 2024); the representativeness of mini-publics (Germann, 2025); and the impact of deliberative methods on public participation (Does & Jacquet, 2023). Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, in Poland call are beginning to occur for a revision of the assumptions of deliberative methods so that they can be disseminated.

The research results presented here are only the first observation of a phenomenon concerning the effectiveness of the recruitment of participants in this process. Its in-depth knowledge and analysis may contribute in the future to make the whole process more effective from the point of view of its organisation.

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[15] "The median acceptance rate out of the 3,435 reported cases is 4%, 90% of the cases have an acceptance rate below 11%, and only 4 cases report an acceptance rate above 40%" (Spada & Peixoto, 2025, pp. 148–149).

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## *Acts*

Stanowisko Urzędu Miasta Łodzi w sprawie właściwej formy prawnej dla przeprowadzenia panelu obywatelskiego oraz możliwości wykorzystania danych z rejestru wyborców lub ewidencji ludności na cele zaproszenia mieszkańców do udziału w panelu [Position of the City Council of Łódź on the appropriate legal form for holding a citizens' panel and the possibility of using data from the electoral register or the population register for the purposes of inviting residents to participate in the panel]. https://uml.lodz.pl/files/public/uploads/panel_obywatelski/formalne/Stanowisko_panel_obywatelski.pdf [accessed: 22.02.2025]

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Ustawa prawo zamówień publicznych [Public Procurement Law], Dz.U.2024.1320 t.j.

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All data will be available and shared upon request.