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Chapter 10

From Wicked Problems to the Wickedization of Solutions: The Case of the French Citizens Convention for Climate

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Abstract

This chapter analyzes the French Citizens Convention for Climate (CCC), a democratic experiment in public policy cocreation, responding to climate change and the democratic crisis. The CCC, involving 150 citizens, aimed to propose measures for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Despite producing 149 proposals, the government's limited implementation led to widespread dissatisfaction, which highlights the complexities of policy cocreation. Through textual statistics analysis, the study reveals the "wicked" nature of cocreation, intensified by diverse values and interests among participants. It underscores the critical need for the government's political readiness and absorptive capacity in cocreation processes. While citizens showed commitment and capability, political-administrative elites displayed resistance, indicating a policy capacity gap. This resistance not only undermined the CCC's efforts but also exacerbated public distrust in political processes. The CCC's experience suggests that future cocreation initiatives in public policy must better integrate with political decision-making. The balance between standardization and contextual adaptation is key to effectively addressing complex societal issues. This chapter advocates for close monitoring of cocreation applications in public policy to assess their effectiveness in resolving societal challenges.

Keywords: Absorptive capacity; citizen participation; cocreation; policy capacity; wickedization

1. Introduction

The alarm bells have not stopped ringing since the publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC's) first report on the state of the art of scientific knowledge about climate change in 1990 and the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. For the past 30 years, the need for sustainable development has been clear, and the objective of reaching it is shared worldwide. While progress has been made since the beginning of the 1990s, it is neither fast nor broad enough. Given this observation, a possibility to accelerate and widen the scope of this movement is to consider the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as wicked problems that require joint and innovative public policy and public action. Indeed, while technical and scientific solutions exist, it is clear that the envisaged solutions are difficult to legitimize, and the change difficult to implement. The SDGs respond above all to an eminently political logic in the construction of responses that explain these difficulties and invite us to conceive of them as wicked problems. Moreover, the wicked dimension of the SDGs can be applied to both the nature of the problem posed and the responses provided. Even though these responses can be politically and managerially very innovative, as in the case of extensive citizen participation mechanisms, they seem to systematically fail in the face of the magnitude of the challenge. We suggest that the pitfall comes from solutions that are thought of in a technical and rational way, to problems that are certainly scientific in nature but embedded in their social environment, responding to a political and nontechnical logic. Consequently, well-crafted technical solutions can evolve into politically intricate challenges during their implementation, undergoing a process of "*wickedization*".

We propose to explore this assertion in the context of the French Citizens Convention for Climate (CCC). The CCC has been launched by the French government in 2019, asking a panel of citizens to think about policies through which France could drastically reduce its carbon emissions. This initiative was relatively unprecedented: apart from anecdotal and not always successful examples such as Iceland's (so far failed) participatory revision of its constitution in 2010 or Ireland's citizen assembly working on issues such as abortion or gay marriage, hardly any cases of extensive citizen participation on important policy questions can be found. In the fight against the climate crisis, several participatory initiatives such as the UK Climate Assembly¹ have recently emerged in European countries – among them, the French CCC as what might be the one of the most ambitious undertakings.

These innovative citizen participation projects are part of a new paradigm in public management: cocreation (Torfing et al., 2019). However, such practices are not yet standardized, and are deeply contingent; they are a managerial innovation with its share of surprises and challenges. Thus, we propose to explore the extent to which a cocreation process, initially intended as a means of providing responses to wicked problems, becomes itself the wicked problem. We assume that this "*wickedization*" process could be explained by an analysis of the political capacity

¹<https://www.climateassembly.uk/>

of the government to innovate which is based on readiness and absorptive capacities of political decision-makers to seize the potential of cocreated responses.

This chapter is structured as follows: the first section provides elements to define and frame the problem in order to understand the major change cocreation constitutes in the field of public policy and more particularly in sustainable development. We develop here an analysis of the political capacity as the main determinant of cocreation success, but also failure when it is lacking. We assume that the political capacity of the government to innovate through cocreation is directly linked to the readiness and absorptive capacities of political decision-makers. Then, we present the case of the CCC and the methods based on statistical textual analysis from a corpus of secondary data. The findings demonstrate the wicked dimensions of the cocreation process. We show that cocreation, intended as a solution to a technical and scientific problem, is politically exploited to counter a democratic crisis. However, it ultimately reinforces the crisis because of the inability to connect scientific and technical proposals from civil society to political and governmental decision-making processes. It is not so much the problem that is wicked as the process that can lead to the wickedization of the same object.

2. From Wicked Problems to the Wickedization of Problems and Solutions

The first section highlights the institutionalization of the SDGs and the wickedization of the problems posed (1.1). Then prior literature serves to understand the outlines of cocreation as a new managerial response to address the SDGs. But, like the problems it is supposed to solve, cocreation seems in turn to be pernicious as the bureaucratic and political context is unfavorable (1.2). Then, we propose that the wickedness of cocreation could be explained through an analysis of the political capacity of government (1.3). To benefit from cocreation, the government must be able to seize solutions cocreated by a plurality of actors, including citizens and nonexperts. We thus establish the inextricable link between the absorptive capacity and political capacity of government when it comes to cocreation.

2.1 Back to the Institutionalization of SDGs: From Tame to Wicked Problems

The SDGs are the result of a construction over several decades. And it is only recently that they have been assimilated to wicked problems.

Indeed, from the 1970s onward, the environmental issue became part of scientific debates, with the publication of the Meadows report (*The Limits to Growth*, 1972). In the same year, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) adopted the Polluter-Pays Principle, whereby the polluter has to bear all the costs of preventing and controlling any pollution that it originates. The observation of the biodiversity decline (disappearance of plant and

animal species, depletion of natural resources) is reflected in international agreements, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (1973, Washington) or the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1979, Bern). Nature, its preservation, and pollution, are at the heart of these discussions.

In the 1980s, new global challenges appeared, such as the phenomenon of acid rain or the deterioration of the ozone layer. International and national authorities reacted by promoting technical solutions: adoption of the catalytic converter in Europe, stricter emission standards for large combustion installations (factories, power stations, etc.), the Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer (1985), and the Montreal Protocol (1987).

However, the turning point came in the 1990s with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992, Rio de Janeiro). This first Earth Summit highlighted two challenges of a different nature than the previous ones: sustainable development and climate change. It is no longer a question of acting on the environment but of achieving balanced development based on the economy, society, and the environment, while at the same time making in-depth changes to the way our societies function to limit the (multiple and intertwined) greenhouse gas emissions. This multidimensionality of today's most urgent problems shows that the complexity of global challenges related to sustainable development does not cease to increase. Despite numerous summits (including the Conferences of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – COP), as many conventions and protocols (for example, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, or the 2015 Paris Agreement) and proven scientific knowledge (IPCC reports), progress is slow and narrow.

The expected energy, economic, and societal transitions ... have yet to be achieved. Yet.

The causes are of course numerous, and it is not our purpose here to list them. However, let us simply consider the nature of the successive problems set out above. The first ones, although on a large scale, were largely resolved thanks to technical innovations, generalized by *ad hoc* regulations. This is no longer the case with sustainable development and the fight against climate change. These require profound changes in the way our societies function. Finally, it is as much the scale of the problem as the scale of the solutions to be implemented that has changed. To express it differently, we have gone from tame problems to wicked problems (Fig. 10.1).

While tame problems are solved through engineering processes with trial-and-error logic and technical rationality, wicked problems in contrast rely on political judgments of ill-defined problems and *ex ante* unverifiable solutions (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Wicked problems are “*complex, unpredictable, open ended, or intractable*” (Head & Alford, 2015). Thus, rather than an *a priori* categorization of tame or wicked problems, it seems essential to take into account both contextual elements and the evolutions of problems that can move from tame to wicked like the SDGs (Alford & Head, 2017). In doing so, it is appropriate to consider a spectrum of possibilities between tame and wicked problems corresponding to degrees of wickedness (Head & Alford, 2015; Ooms & Piepenbrink, 2021). Note

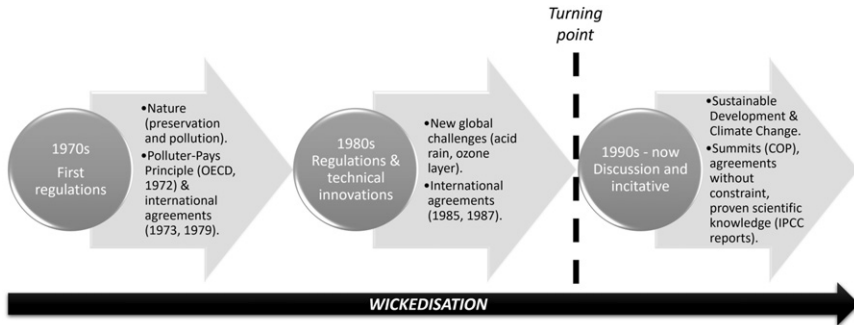


Fig. 10.1. The Wickedization of SDGs. *Source:* Authors.

that in the face of wicked problems, problems and solutions are unclear, requiring a large volume of knowledge, and are both problems and solutions, contested by those involved (Ooms & Piepenbrink, 2021). While an abundant literature has developed around the concept of wicked problems since the 2000s, ultimately, little work has focused on the solutions and particularly the managerial solutions to be deployed (Alford & Head, 2017; Head & Alford, 2015). In this respect, an innovative but highly complex managerial response to tackle the wicked problems of the SDGs is of particular interest to us here: cocreation.

2.2 Cocreation: A Managerial and Organizational Response to Tackle SDGs

As repeatedly highlighted within the SDGs, actors, levels, and countries must come together to address them. One of the goals is explicitly dedicated to the development of “Partnerships for the Goals” (SDG17). Multi-stakeholder partnerships are pointed out as crucial steppingstones toward the achievement of all other goals. On their own, not even the most power- and resourceful actor is able to reach the goals; the involvement of all relevant and affected actors and collaboration with them is what makes it possible to effectively tackle complex policy problems. While cocreation tends to be presented as a cure all in this regard (Voorberg et al., 2015), it does not come without its challenges itself. An important obstacle to overcome is related to the heterogeneity of actors and the potential conflicts this might produce. However, this diversity of actors involved in cocreation is also key for the development of innovative solutions which the SDGs, as wicked problems, require: these ever-evolving, uncertain, and multi-faceted problems cannot be resolved through traditional public action but need emergent responses.

The public sector is today ill-equipped to take on this challenge (Ansell et al., 2021). Its bureaucratic structure and long-established portfolio of responses do not allow for much creativity or adaptation to the complexity of these problems. Recently, a shift in the functioning of public sector organizations can be observed:

citizen participation is on the rise (Sørensen & Torfing, 2019; Torfing & Ansell, 2017) in a public sector that is increasingly marked by collaboration. Among the multiple forms this can take, cocreation, with its aim to develop innovative solutions to societal issues, is quickly becoming popular among public administrations searching for ways to address wicked problems (Hofstad et al., 2021). It brings together a variety of public and private actors around a shared problem, for which they aim to develop new and innovative solutions through an exchange of their different kinds of knowledge, ideas, and resources (Torfing et al., 2019). As a problem-driven and highly creative approach to policymaking, cocreation allows to design ideas that create value not only for participants but for society as a whole. In this perspective, citizens are not only included at an operational level during the implementation of a policy solution, or the delivery of a public service, but also at a more strategic one, as they take part in policy development (McMullin, 2022).

In this regard, cocreation can facilitate the identification and formulation of policy problems, as well as the development of shared understandings and interpretations of these problems as dispersed actors gather and debate. By including actors with diverging interests and motivations in the policymaking process, potential conflicts can be avoided before they arise, and compromise can be found. To do so and achieve the most valuable outcomes, ideally, cocreation would be continuous (Bentzen, 2022), allowing citizens to participate in all stages of the process, from the identification of problems to the design of solutions, their implementation, and evaluation (Nabatchi et al., 2017).

2.3 Cocreation and Political Capacity to Innovate: A Matter of Readiness and Absorptive Abilities?

Cocreation practices have the potential to provide an “additional capacity” that enhances the governing abilities to address wicked problems of sustainability. Indeed, we can assume that the ideas, resources, and work deployed by a plurality of internal and external actors bring an additional capacity that should ultimately improve the performance and effectiveness of the policymaker. Thus, in the case of cocreation, additional policy capacity depends directly on the appropriation of the cocreation work by policymakers who recognize both the reliability of the work undertaken and the relevance of the cocreated solutions. Indeed, the advantages of cocreation rely on the enrichment of knowledge by external sources from which policymakers benefit through the design of original solutions that are de facto legitimized by the democratic nature of the process. In the field of management sciences, this capacity to take possession of ideas and solutions developed by other actors, external to the traditional decision-making processes, refers to the absorptive capacity. Coined by Cohen and Levinthal (1990), the absorptive capacity is defined as the ability to recognize the value of new information from the environment, to assimilate it and to exploit it. This implies that a group of actors such as the political-administrative elites must tap into various sources of external knowledge and be able to integrate them. In this perspective,

when government needs to design innovative policies, political capacity (Howlett & Ramesh, 2015) is determined by the absorptive capacity of policymakers. Thus, here we consider absorptive capacity as a determinant of political capacity when it comes to performing political functions in order to innovate. Analyzing the political capacity of the government and more precisely the absorptive capacity enables to better understand why cocreation is so little deployed whereas it is so attractive on paper.

Cocreation is far from being a taken-for-granted practice. It is a major challenge in the transformations underway to achieve the SDGs. While it encompasses a set of technically elaborate practices covering all stages of the public policy process, cocreation is hardly ever this extensive today. Citizens are most likely involved in later stages of the policy process – i.e., its implementation – and less so in the planning and design phases (Sørensen & Torfing, 2022) or the final decision-making that tend to happen in-house. Especially when citizens are not part of important decisions or the process lacks transparency, cocreation might entail negative consequences instead of the proclaimed benefits. In lieu of improving democracy, social cohesion, innovativeness, and legitimacy of decisions and joint ownership of them (Torfing et al., 2019), cocreation gone wrong might generate frustration, alienation, and disconnection, and reinforce inequality and power disparities (Steen et al., 2018). These negative aspects of cocreation arise from the lack of absorptive capacity, which in turn affects the political capacity of the government. Thus, we assume that, within a cocreation framework, the ability to exploit external knowledge – the absorptive capacity – is a critical component of political capacity to address SDGs.

For politicians, the main challenge in such contexts consists in avoiding the pathology of the “not-invented-here” (NIH) and the “All-Stored-Here” (ASH) syndromes (Ooms & Piepenbrink, 2021). NIH syndrome is symptomatic of people traditionally in charge of new proposals in an organization who negatively perceive and oppose ideas coming from outside. The ASH syndrome is a form of disregard for the potential input of external stakeholders. Essentially, these two syndromes go hand in hand and reflect the lack of absorptive capacity. The strategies of obstructing transparency, reducing spaces for cocreation, and predominantly anecdotal evidence of citizen practices are rather clear symptoms. If policymakers were more prepared and trained in cocreation, it would reduce their chances of developing NIH and ASH syndromes. They could then deploy their absorptive capacity to enhance the value of cocreated solutions. Their political capacity to innovate would thus be strengthened. As underlined by Lippi and Tsekos in the introduction of this book, the question of the readiness of political decision-makers is therefore crucial and especially when they must absorb the outputs of cocreation.

Thus, we assume that cocreation, as a response to the SDGs, can itself become a wicked problem. We propose to highlight this process of wickedization based on a lack of absorptive and political capacities through the case of the CCC in France.

3. Case Study: The French CCC, a Democratic Experiment for a More Sustainable Future

This section presents the case of the CCC (3.1), the methodology adopted (3.2), and the findings (3.3).

3.1 The French CCC: Context, Modalities, and Results

In 2019, the French government was not only dealing with the climate crisis and finding ways to comply with the 2015 Paris Agreement but confronted with a democratic crisis at the same time, sparked by the Yellow Vests. What began as a protest against the carbon tax quickly turned into a much larger movement, pointing out social inequalities and injustice in France. As a reaction to this upheaval, French president Emmanuel Macron first decided to launch the “Grand Debate,” a nationwide consultation of the population on topics such as the environmental transition, democracy, or the organization of public service. To go one step further, he announced mid-2019 the creation of the CCC where a group of citizens would be asked to suggest measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030 in a spirit of social justice. Promising to submit “without filter” this group’s proposals to his government, the president instructed the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) to organize this citizen assembly for which a budget of 5.4 million Euros was provided.

3.1.1 150 Citizens, 7 Weekends, and 149 Propositions

To ensure descriptive representation of the French population, 3,000 telephone numbers were randomly selected based on multiple demographic criteria. Ultimately, 150 of them were chosen to represent the population in the CCC: aged between 16 and 80, with different levels of education, and coming from all over the Hexagon, this group of citizens was meant to depict the country’s diversity. Over the course of nine months, they would gather on seven weekends at the CESE headquarters in Paris.

Divided into five predefined working groups (housing, food, work and production, transportation, consumption) and supported by facilitators, legal and economic experts, as well as scientists acting as fact-checkers, these citizens got to work in early October 2019. The first three-day weekend consisted of the installation of the CCC, the presentation of working methods, and a first look into the topics to be treated. The government was represented by the Prime Minister as well as the Minister of Ecology to formally launch the CCC. The second weekend started with keynotes to establish a common knowledge base before the working groups got together and began to establish first objectives for each topic. On the third weekend, further discussions with experts allowed to delve deeper, and first lists of ideas and proposals were produced. The fourth session was marked by the speech of president Macron, ensuring continuous involvement after the end of the CCC. Over the course of the fifth weekend, each working group pitched their

ideas to the others, so that the final deliverable could be prepared. In early March 2020, this final report was discussed and validated by the CCC. Then, COVID-19 hit. After months of lockdown, the CCC got together again in June 2020 for a final debate, and to formally submit their 149 proposals to the French government. The 150 members of the CCC were invited to the Elysée Palace the following week, where the president declared that 146 of their measures would be examined, rejecting the three remaining ones using the “jokers” he had announced at the beginning of the CCC.

3.1.2 What Happened With the Proposals?

Over the following months, first decisions were taken: a handful of measures such as the ban of the heating of outdoor public spaces in winter were implemented. In the “France Relance” plan announced in September 2020 as a reaction to the pandemic, several proposals were included, as well as in the Climate and Resilience law of February 2021. The CCC convened for one final time in February 2021 to react to the governmental responses to their work: they declared that the actions taken by the government were not satisfactory given the ambition of their proposals. While in 2022, the government points out that of the 149 measures proposed by the CCC, 100 have been implemented entirely or partially, at a closer look, it quickly becomes obvious that only anecdotal measures have been implemented, while others have been largely modified and hardly resemble what the CCC had in mind.

3.2 Methodology

The following paragraphs describe the data collection process that led to the construction of the corpus, on which the textual statistics analyses were conducted.

The empirical analysis is based on secondary data corresponding to information, published between spring 2019 and September 2022, and all related to the work of the CCC.

In total, 210 documents, or 424,451 words (occurrences), were collected. According to our research objectives, we assigned four variables to each document: the document number, the timeline (before, during, and after the convention), the type of document (press, governmental report, convention report, press release, internal technical documents, and presidential speech), and the source (name of each journal, government, presidency, and CCC). All these documents form our corpus, which we have exploited through quantitative analysis of qualitative data (textual statistics) with the IRAMUTEQ software.

The main interest of textual statistics methods is to consider texts as they have been written, without interpretation or codification by a mediator (Lebart &

Salem, 1994). They are also recommended when the researcher is confronted with a large mass of data that they wish to condense, classify, and structure to make it more intelligible.

The main objective of cluster analysis (in this case, hierarchical top-down classification) is to group objects into homogeneous classes, so that those within a class are very similar and those in different classes are very dissimilar. Factor analysis simplifies the data by highlighting a few general factors or key dimensions. These methods are based on statistical frequency calculations.

3.3 Findings

We conducted a first cluster analysis, in which 97.57% of the initial corpus were classified. Three significant classes emerged. The first (46% of the classified corpus) focuses on the CCC, the second (35%) on the public policy instruments needed to implement the Convention's proposals, and the third (19%) on the problems identified and requiring intervention measures (e.g. greenhouse gas emissions, agriculture, imports, consumption, plastics, fishing, etc.).

We choose not to elaborate on the outcomes of this initial cluster analysis, as two categories fail to clarify how innovative citizen participation practices, initially a solution to wicked problems, have become a wicked problem themselves.

Therefore, we performed a second cluster analysis and a factor analysis on the sub-corpus of the CCC class (Fig. 10.2).

The factorial design summarizes the results of the second cluster analysis. The factors explain 100% of the variance. Factor 1 (y-axis) corresponds to the wick-edization of problems. Its ends are Tame problems (bottom of the quadrant) and Wicked problems (top of the quadrant). This factor has greater explanatory power than the second, accounting for about two-thirds of the variance. The second factor is also significant (although to a lesser extent): this is the stakeholder axis (x-axis). This axis has two ends: on the left, Public Authorities, on the right, Citizens.

Let us now detail the three classes that appear on the factorial design.

Class 1, named "*Political decision*," includes different groups of public authorities. The most significant forms designate the *president*, the *government*, the *ministers* (exercise of executive power). They also refer to the legislative work (*law*, *review*, *proposal*, *regulation*, *moratorium*, *measure*) carried out by members of parliament (*Senate*, *National Assembly*, *Senator*, *MP*).

Beyond the political actors, this class highlights political strategies and tactics implemented during the process of the citizens convention: *filter*, *joker*, *ambition*, *unraveling*, *surprise*, *arbitration*, as they have been widely denounced by convention members, media, and a part of the civil society (NGO):

They [the members of the convention] point out that many of their measures have been completely distorted by taking up only part of them. They emphasised the coherence of their proposals and their

participation, the collective (group), the place of debate, diversity, the representative, deliberative and civil characters, the transparency of the processes, and the legitimacy that derives from them. This class also points out the limits of the cocreation process: “For the environmental lawyer, if the recommendations of the convention are not followed by politicians, citizens will have no legal recourse. The consequences depend solely on the will of the President of the Republic” (press article, *Le Monde*, published just after the end of the Convention).

Finally, Class 3 refers to the *Challenges* that the convention addresses from three perspectives: the challenges’ extent, the challenges’ purpose, and the duty to act in response.

The *extent* of the challenges is not only qualified by its intensity (*crisis*) and *urgency* (*threat, upheaval, blockage, risk*) but also by the *issues at stake* (the challenges themselves), such as *global warming, biodiversity, agriculture, social, economic, health, human, Earth, justice*, etc. In its work (April 2020), the convention underlines “the contribution of the Citizens Climate Convention to the crisis recovery plan. We want a crisis recovery strategy to prepare for the future, i.e., a different economic and societal model, more humane and more resilient to future crises (...)”.

Faced with these elements, *action* is necessary: we must *question, understand* challenges, build *new responses*, find *solutions*, *solve* problems, *mobilize, convince*, and find *opportunities*.

We want to enshrine the green rule in the constitution, no longer taking more from nature than it is capable of replenishing. It is an immense human and technical challenge, but France has the assets to take it up and to be at the forefront of the global change that must take place. (Press article, *L’Humanité*, April 2021)

Let us now turn to the discussion section to understand, from the empirical study, how and to what extent the cocreation process has become a wicked problem.

4. Discussion

To what extent does the cocreation process itself become a wicked problem? Based on the evidence in our findings of a wickedization of the CCC, we discuss in the following paragraphs the wicked dimensions of cocreation explained through a lack of political capacity and especially the lack of readiness and absorptive capacities from political decision-makers.

4.1 *The French CCC Experience and the Wicked Dimension of a Cocreation Process*

Considering differences in values and interests as the main characteristics of wickedness, it seems clear that a response through cocreation necessarily leads to

an intensification of wickedness. Indeed, by integrating a plurality of actors, cocreation increases the range of possibilities in terms of divergent perceptions, conflicting interests, and diverse values. Then, considering wickedness as an analytical perspective and not a tool for problem classification (as pointed out in the introduction of this book), we propose here a new approach to cocreation, namely a “wicked” approach that applies not only to societal problems but also to the responses aimed at solving them.

Initially, the problems related to the practice of cocreation lay in its implementation and structuring, with, for example, the methods of selection and drawing of citizens. At the time of the launch of the process, the practice seemed to be taken for granted by the government, with the commitment of the French President to retain “without filter” the proposals made by the CCC. However, a gradual disengagement took place, and problems – particularly of political nature – emerged as the cocreation process unfolded. In the end, out of the 149 proposals formulated by the convention, only the anecdotal measures were the subject of a political decision without any filter. Finally, while the complexity of the problems seemed to be related to the content of the CCC at first as it had to work on solutions to the climate crisis, eventually, it was even more acute at the level of the very functioning of the CCC and its connection to effective political decisions. The complexity of the form thus took precedence over the complexity of the content. In the case of the French CCC, cocreation as a policymaking tool was meant to generate socially acceptable solutions to the wicked problem of climate change. However, what was initially thought of as a technical tool to be used to tackle other problems quickly became a problem itself – and a rather wicked one.

4.2 The Explanatory Factors of the CCC's Failure: A Lack of Readiness and Absorptive Capacities

In our case, it is political disagreement that leads to wickedness. Indeed, analytical capacity and operational capacity to design innovative policies to address the SDGs have been provided by the CCC. The CCC's output was based on training sessions for citizens and the intervention of numerous experts to both accompany the citizens' reflections and help them build relevant and feasible proposals. The identified solutions are based on technical and scientific logics. In this regard, it is worth noting that the CCC demonstrated their capacity to elaborate technical responses. While the use of simplified and persuasive narratives is a common strategy adopted by political and administrative elites who wish to convince their stakeholders whose understanding of the issues may be limited, in our case, the CCC has adopted the exact opposite strategy. The objective is precisely to demonstrate the technicality of the developed solutions, whose argumentation is based on a scientific narrative. The challenge here is to convince political and administrative elites of the validity and technical reliability of the solutions provided. These elites are perceived here as being a priori capable of understanding the complexity. The challenge for the CCC is also to ensure its technical legitimacy through elaborate discursive strategies and a lexical field linked to the

expertise of the treated domain. Then, CCC's work demonstrates that it is possible to hybridize both technocratic and participatory responses. While the CCC fulfilled the analytical and operational expectations through the design of technical solutions in different sectors, the failure of the cocreation process relies on the political capacity. Although these solution proposals seem difficult to refute, the government and the President only retain anecdotal measures based on political and not technical rationality. The proposals resulting from the cocreation process are thus finally evaluated according to "good-or-bad" political criteria and not "true-or-false" scientific and technical criteria (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Indeed, in this cocreation process, the political capacity is in the hands of the politicians who still have the decision-making power and the responsibility to prioritize. Here, the main failure noted lies in the acceptability of politicians vis-à-vis the policy measures designed by the CCC. It is their political capacity that is lacking to ensure the success of such a cocreation process.

The wickedness of cocreation can be explained by the uncertainty generated by managerial innovation. Cocreation as an emerging approach is a managerial innovation that is also rooted in local and contingent realities. As a result, practices are constantly renewed and difficult to envisage in their entirety before being implemented. In this respect, it is pointed out that the CCC was supposed to be directly connected to the public decision-making process with an "unfiltered" commitment from the President. This methodological choice was finally abandoned, and cocreation was quickly disconnected from the decision-making processes. As a cocreation process, CCC is a new practice, and the political elites here show a strong path dependence and thus a strong attachment to more traditional public policy design practices. The political disagreement observed in our case could be understood as politicians' lack of ability to change: they demonstrate a strong resistance to adopt new arrangements that have not been designed by themselves. The ability to change refers to the readiness capacity of politicians mentioned above by Lippi and Tsekos. Politicians show a lack of readiness capacity that prevents them from dealing with urgency and resisting pressures from outside when it comes to assuming and supporting the work of the CCC through the passage of political decisions and legislation. Thus, in a cocreation framework, the readiness capacity of politicians is an antecedent of their absorptive capacity, which is itself a factor of their political capacity to innovate. When the readiness capacity fails, policymakers are closed to outside ideas and unable to acknowledge their value. In this regard, they developed the NIH and the ASH syndromes (Ooms & Piepenbrink, 2021) which in our case results in the rejection of most of the solutions proposed by CCC.

Furthermore, the lack of absorptive capacity, highlighted by the development of the NIH and SAT syndromes, can lead to highly counterproductive effects on the political capacity of the government through the loss of legitimacy. Let us remember that the CCC was originally initiated with the political will to fight against the crisis of representative democracy that France is experiencing. Particularly in response to the Yellow Vests crisis, this cocreation process was intended to rebuild trust and promote the legitimacy of the State by establishing a participatory and democratic body. Citizens' expectations were therefore

particularly high. Also, given the political abandonment of most of the proposals, the disappointment was so great that this cocreation process finally reinforced citizens' distrust. Then, the CCC, the first experience of its kind in France, was not without consequences. Indeed, in the face of the failure of the mechanism that was supposed to rebuild trust and bridges with citizens, a few years later, the observation of a democratic fracture was confirmed in the last presidential elections of 2022 with a record rate of abstention and the rise in power of populist parties. Thus, the extent of the democratic crisis does not allow for any space for trial and error. Each attempt at cocreation, let alone each failure, has consequences and leaves its marks. Consequently, the readiness capacity of policymakers to implement their absorptive capacity to citizens' proposals can have a lasting and significant effect on the political capacity of the government, but also on institutional capacity in a broader sense when it is lacking.

5. Conclusion

The work of the CCC ended according to a predefined timetable, considering that it was “good enough,” having done its job in the time available – it did not end because it had actually “resolved” the climate crisis in France. In this regard, it could even be considered a failure if one takes into account the actual national political decisions that resulted from the process: this number remains anecdotal.

Our study reveals that many barriers to the deployment of cocreation exist. While civil society seems ready to adopt such processes and practices, the government turns out to be more resistant. On the one hand, citizens proved their willingness to get involved and acquire new knowledge and competences, as well as their ability to develop highly technical and concrete policy solutions to complex problems, despite their lack of expertise. On the other hand, we also shed light on the significant role played by the absorptive capacity of policymakers. If cocreation practices can lead to additional political capacity to address the SDGs, their success depends directly on the absorptive capacity of the political-administrative elites, who need to be sensitized and trained. If cocreation practices can lead to additional political capacity to address the SDGs, their success depends directly on the absorptive capacity of the political-administrative elites. They need to be sensitized and trained even before developing any cocreation practices, however innovative they may be.

Their discovery of this resistance and lack of absorptive capacity was a harsh return to reality for the members of the CCC as they did not see the results they had hoped for. Citizens' expectations for this cocreation process had been high, and this disappointment had important repercussions on the already strained relationship between societal and political spheres. Expectations on the side of policymakers had been high as well: officially, the CCC was intended and expected to provide solutions for the climate crisis. More implicitly, there was also hope that it would help alleviate the democratic crisis and improve the overall political climate in France, which, following the Yellow Vests movement, was tense. Given these high expectations on both sides, every wrong move and slip-page could have significant consequences.

Despite, or precisely because of their dissatisfaction with the results of the CCC, shortly after its end, its members have established an association in order to ensure independence and continuity. Now, the CCC's undertaking is to build the legitimacy of their solutions through territorial dissemination on the one hand and lobbying on the other. Local citizen convention initiatives have emerged, too, this time connected to local public policies. Moreover, while one might think that this new mechanism of cocreation would be dropped after this relatively unsuccessful first attempt, it has recently been revived through a new citizens' convention on the issue of end-of-life support. Thus, the practice of cocreation and its modalities are being re-examined in order to improve the process so that it is better connected to political decision-making processes, showing that "some additional investment of effort might increase the chances of finding a better solution" (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 162). This goes to show the evolving nature of cocreation, its dependence on the context in which it unfolds as well as on underlying perceptions and interpretations. The CCC represents a first attempt at national-level cocreation amidst a backdrop of particularly complex problems. To evaluate whether the cocreation approach is adapted for the resolution of wicked policy issues, it would be interesting to closely follow the evolutions and new applications of this mechanism, and study their results.

While cocreation corresponds to a new paradigm of public management, its implementation is eminently contextual and requires adaptation to local contingencies. As a new paradigm, it follows clearly identifiable principles such as the orientation toward innovation, the integration of citizens in the decision-making process, decompartmentalization, and collaborative work with diversified actors. Certain standards, best practices, or models can therefore be identified and applied in different cases and contexts. However, adapting cocreation mechanisms to local circumstances and requirements is necessary to effectively connect them with political decision-making processes. This balance between standardization and uniqueness is where cocreation reveals its complexity – and wickedness.

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