

DIGITAL DEMOCRACY DAY 2016

WILL E-PARTICIPATION BRING CITIZENS BACK TO THE EU?

18 OCTOBER 2016 | BRUSSELS

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DIGITAL DEMOCRACY DAY 2016
18 OCTOBER 2016 - REPRESENTATION OF SAXONY-ANHALT TO THE EUROPEAN UNION - BOULEVARD SAINT-MICHEL, 80 - 1040 BRUSSELS



 **SACHSEN-ANHALT**
Ministerium für
Inneres und Sport

ecds
Making Europe Work for Citizens


 **SACHSEN-ANHALT**
Vertretung bei der
Europäischen Union

- REPORT -

PROGRAMME

Tuesday 18 October, 8.45 -16.00

Welcome speech

- 9.15
- Dr. Beate Bettecken, Head of Department, Central Affairs and Human Resources, Ministry of Saxony-Anhalt
 - Maximilian Strotmann, Communications Adviser, Member of the Cabinet of Commissioner Andrus Ansip

E-participation is the New Black: The Voice of EU Citizens through Digital Tools

- 9.40
- Elisa Lironi, Digital Democracy Manager, European Citizen Action Service (ECAS)
[Brief Presentation of ECAS Digital Democracy Focus area and the study 'Potential and Challenges of E-Participation in the EU

Panel 1: Future E-Participation tools and methods in the EU: What possibilities for Crowdsourcing?

- 10.00
- Moderator: Assya Kavrakova, Director, European Citizen Action Service (ECAS)
 - Angeline Woods, Principal Associate, Freshfields
 - Anthony Zacharzewski, Director, Democratic Society
 - Simon Delakorda, Director, Institute for Electronic Participation (INePA)
 - Dr. Jordanka Tomkova, E-governance Advisor, INNOVABRIDGE Foundation

11.30 Coffee Break

Panel 2: Youth E-Participation: Engaging Digital Natives in Policy-Making

- 11.45
- Moderator: Elisa Lironi, Digital Democracy Manager, European Citizen Action Service (ECAS)
 - Fraser Henderson, The Consultation Institute (tCI)
 - Christian Scharf, Chief Executive, Go Europe, Youth Information Center, Deutsches Rotes Kreuz
 - Evaldas Rupkus, International youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany and Coordinator of 'EUth - Tools and Tips for Mobile and Digital Youth Participation in and across Europe'
 - Leonie Martin, Vice-President, Young European Federalists (JEF Europe)

13.15 Lunch break

Panel 3: E-Participation and Political Parties: Connecting Citizens to Politicians

- 14.15
- Moderator: Jennifer Baker, Journalist, VIEUWS
 - Daría Terrádez, Director General of EU Affairs, Valencian Regional Government
 - Hannes Leo, CEO of CBased, Developer of Discuto
 - Christopher Clay, Communications Advisor to Julia Reda MEP
 - Daniel Schily, Executive Manager, Democracy International Germany

Concluding remarks

- 15.45
- Dr. Henrike Franz, Head of the Representation of Saxony-Anhalt to the EU
 - Assya Kavrakova, Director, European Citizen Action Service (ECAS)

16.00 Networking Cocktail



WELCOMING AND INTRODUCTION ON DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

Beate Bettecken, Head of Department at the Ministry of Saxony-Anhalt, and **Maximilian Strotmann**, Member of the Cabinet of Commissioner Andrus Ansip, were the guest speakers of the event. They discussed the reasons why e-participation is underrated in the current political debate at local, national and EU level, and how a thorough discussion of it could help fill the spreading gap between citizens and European political institutions. We now have the technology to make digital participation a reality but one of the main challenges is still about reaching the parts of the population that have no access to it.

Elisa Lironi, Digital Democracy Manager at ECAS, gave an introductory presentation on the concepts of digital democracy and e-participation. She analysed the relationship between digital democracy and traditional forms of democracy, coming to the conclusion that the two should complement each other. Furthermore, she explained why the topics of the three panels (crowdsourcing, youth e-participation and connecting citizens and politicians) were chosen for the conference and how a discussion on them can foster our understanding of the challenges and opportunities of digital democracy in the EU.



1st PANEL: FUTURE E-PARTICIPATION TOOLS AND METHODS IN THE EU - WHAT POSSIBILITIES FOR CROWDSOURCING?

The first panel explored from different perspectives the potential and challenges of crowdsourcing in the EU.

Assya Kavrakova, ECAS Director, moderator of the panel, introduced the latest working paper of ECAS “Towards a Crowdsourcing Pilot at the EU level: Taking Decisions with Citizens and Not for Them” to start the debate.

Angeline Woods, Principal Associate of Freshfields, addressed the problem of defining what a crowdsourcing process is and what its components are. The definitions are countless and often not very precise.

After defining the term, Ms Woods explored the reasons why the EU needs crowdsourcing and what are the main obstacles to its implementation. One of the main challenges is that Member States fear crowdsourcing could change the balance of power in Europe.

Next, the characteristics of an effective pilot crowdsourcing project were analysed (full representativeness, engagement of the youth, innovative ideas etc.). Possible candidates for a pilot are the following policy fields: environment, education training and youth, fundamental rights and equality, employment and social policy, development and cooperation. Ms Woods pointed out that the chosen field should not be too technical or too political.

The European Citizens’ Initiative might have been a good starting point for e-participation in the EU, but it led to the frustration of many citizens due to its inefficiency and ineffectiveness. In the conclusion of the speech several implementation strategies were briefly discussed.

Anthony Zacharzewski, Director of the Democratic Society, focused on the crowdsourcing projects in Scotland. The main obstacle to a successful implementation is the perceived distance between citizens and policy-makers. They speak two different languages: the language of policies and the language of everyday life. This is even truer when European institutions are taken into consideration. What we need is to find a method to effectively translate one language into the other. Without such a

method, the risk is to advantage highly educated people and those who already work in the policy-making field, who become the only ones able to participate in crowdsourcing processes.

Simon Delakorda, Director of the Institute for Electronic Participation, explained the present state of crowdsourcing in Europe and the perspectives for the future.

The past history of e-participation at the EU level was discussed, with its different phases.

At present, there is not just one way to measure e-participation, and none of them are easy to operationalise. Whatever the method one may want to use to measure it, however, one thing is certain: not many people are participating using the e-participation tools offered by the EU.

This lack of participation makes these tools extremely expensive compared to their outcomes. Moreover, they are not really helping to improve the idea that EU citizens have of EU institutions.

And nevertheless, in a continent where traditional forms of democratic participation are everyday less popular, e-participation, and crowdsourcing in general, are a necessity.

Regarding the possibility of a crowdsourcing pilot at the EU level, people will not participate if they do not see that their participation can have a potential impact. Citizens would have to be properly informed about the existence of the pilot before it is implemented and civil society's contribution is essential to determine its success.

Dr. Jordanka Tomkova, an E-governance adviser of Innovabridge Foundation, started by explaining the role of technology in contemporary democracies and the opportunities it presents for crowdsourcing practices.

Among these opportunities, there are new forms of volunteerism, the role of collective intelligence and the digital environments, flexible community formation, increased cost efficiency, co-creation and innovation and in general a potential democratization of our societies.

There are also challenges, mainly concerning the recruitment of the crowd and equal opportunities of participation vs self-selection of the participants. Selecting the right tools or creating new ones (and in what way) is also an important issue.

Additionally, Dr Tomkova presented specific cases of crowdsourcing in different European (Ukraine, UK) and non-European countries (US, Montenegro).

Among the characteristics to be considered when designing of a new crowdsourcing model, a few were identified as the most important ones: a clear focus and purpose, knowing your crowd and the toolbox you are using, a multidisciplinary approach, incentive structures and effectively blending online and offline.

A series of **interventions from the public** followed. The main topics were:

- The trade-off between already existing tools and the creation of new ones;
- The problem of lack of information (people must be informed about the projects);
- The importance of assuring citizens that their participation will have a real impact;
- The transparency of the decisions and the problem of feedback.



2ND PANEL: YOUTH E-PARTICIPATION. ENGAGING DIGITAL NATIVES IN POLICY-MAKING

The second panel focused on the role of youth e-participation, and how young people can influence policy-making through digital tools.

Elisa Lironi, Digital Democracy Manager at ECAS, moderator of the panel introduced the topic of the panel and the speakers.

Fraser Henderson, from The Consultation Institute, referred to the problem of the gap in Europe between citizens and EU institutions. On the one hand, there are structured and highly technical conversations inside EU institutions, and on the other hand, unstructured and politicised conversations among the general population.

However, using social networks to gather information about people's opinions is ethically problematic and can also bring technical problems:

- About 3% to 4% of social media content is an opinion, therefore a screening procedure is necessary.
- People communicate on social networks in many different languages, making the 'social listening' rather expensive (translation costs) and complicated (coordination and evaluation of the content).

Mr Henderson also described an active pilot project under the EU's Erasmus+ programme called DEEP-linking Youth, involving several European organisations.

Christian Scharf, Chief Executive of Go Europe, outlined the current state of democracy in Europe. He focused on the importance of democratic and civic education, which should start very early, during childhood.

He described the objectives and the outcomes of the Young Europe project, taking into consideration several innovative approaches to political education, such as the use of gamification (ex. Minecraft), videos, podcasts etc.

Finally, the idea of European mobility as a right for all young Europeans was presented as a means to enhance the participation of the parts of the population with fewer economic and cultural resources.

Evaldas Rupkus, from the International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany, started with a general introduction on the role of e-participation in Europe and the opportunities that it may offer for the future. Evaldas Ruptus described two main aspects of e-participation:

- Citizens' participation in the decision-making process;
- Other forms of participation that do not influence the decision-making process directly.

Mr Rupkus presented the project "EUth - Tools and Tips for Mobile and Digital Youth Participation in and across Europe" involving 11 partners (from private, public and third sectors) in 8 different countries. The aim of the project is to have more people involved in e-participation methods to reach out to decision-makers

The main partners are youth organisations and public administrations. Several e-participation software tools for computers and mobile phones (available in 7 different languages) were created for the project. The tools are for non-experts and present a user friendly interface.

When implementing crowdsourcing experiments, it is important to collect feedback since the beginning of a project, in order to be able to correct the inefficiencies and limit the waste of time and economic resources.

Leonie Martin, Vice-President of the Young European Federalists (JEF Europe), after a brief presentation of JEF Europe, focused on the reasons a more active involvement of young European citizens in the political life of the EU is essential for its survival. In order to involve young people in policy-making, there needs to be a coordinated effort by both citizens and decision-makers, which includes more information available and more instruments for participation. Furthermore, citizen's interest and awareness of daily political life are also the basis of a healthy democracy.

A series of **interventions from the public** followed. The topics were:

- How to increase youth involvement in the political life;
- The way the political decisions are taken today does not appeal to young people, and how to deal with it;
- The reasons of the scarce participation of young people in the vote on Brexit;
- The limits of gamification as a tool for participation.



3RD PANEL: E-PARTICIPATION AND POLITICAL PARTIES. CONNECTING CITIZENS TO POLITICIANS

The third panel analysed the reasons behind the growing gap between citizens and traditional politics, and what could and should be done to reduce it.

Jennifer Baker, Journalist at VIEUWS on digital affairs, was the moderator of the panel.

Daria Terradez, General Director of EU Affairs at the Valencian Regional Government (Spain), talked about the importance of e-participation for connecting citizens to politicians, focusing on the case of Valencia region. In the last few years there have been improvements in political transparency (e.g. curricula of politicians have been published online), but there are still many obstacles to citizens' participation; some of them are cultural (a lack of tradition in direct political participation, a general disaffection of citizens for politics), some technical (digital divide). In order to promote participation as a fundamental right, the role of social networks must be promoted, and local politicians will have to take action in the direction of a more participatory for of democracy.

Hannes Leo, CEO of CBased, was the second speaker of the panel. His speech focused on the presentation of the e-participation platform 'Discuto', and how it can be used to enhance the quality of crowdsourcing initiatives. A few examples were given, and in particular the case of the ideation of a digital agenda for the city of Vienna.

The speaker proceeded talking about the challenges and the opportunities provided by online engagement platforms and mainly the technicalities to be taken into consideration when developing a platform for crowdsourcing ideas.

In the last part of the speech, a thoroughly description of how 'Discuto' works was provided, together with its potentialities as a tool to enhance citizens participation throughout Europe.

Christopher Clay, Communications Adviser to Julia Reda (MEP), presented several e-participation and crowdsourcing initiatives taken by Julia Reda and her staff since she became a Member of the European Parliament. He explained why the case of Brexit represents a failure of the old model of participation and how we can learn from it to

develop more modern participatory tools. The answer is not less participation but more.

However, the focus cannot be just on quantity, but an effort must be made to ensure that these instruments are qualitatively satisfactory. The basis is being transparent. It is also important that when people participate, the results are concrete, so that they can see their contribution was worth the effort.

It is then important to transform participation into a habit for citizens, otherwise it will always be a top-down process.

Daniel Schily, Executive Manager of Democracy International Germany, focused on the increasing importance of electronic media in our daily lives, and how they can be used by citizens to positively influence political decisions. The problem, however, is that very few people participate. The most successful crowdsourcing platform are private (Avaaz, Change, etc.) and therefore not fully disconnected from economic interests. One solution would be the creation of a safe public platform of online participation. People do not use public tools because currently these tools either do not exist, they are not as efficient as the private ones, or they are not correctly advertised.

A top-down strategy is therefore needed in order to effectively promote e-democracy in Europe. It could be completely public or, better, something between public and private, funded by the State and at least partially controlled by it.

In the interventions, the following topics emerged:

- The relationship between representative and direct democracy.
- Quality of the consultations vs quantity.