



eDemocracy

Driving citizen advocacy through digital means

Online workshop series: 4, 8, and 10 September 2020, via ZOOM

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Since governments across Europe are still very cautious towards enabling state-led eDemocracy initiatives for citizen involvement in policy-making, the project will research, collect, assess, and present the ever-growing number of innovative good practices for citizen's-led, informal participation and governance scrutiny through digital means.

Rationale of the project

Digital tools allow for an unprecedented inclusion of citizens in all areas of public action, with the potential to improve the quality of democracy and governance through greater participation and citizen-centric policy-making. Governments, however, have taken radically different approaches across Europe, either facilitating or hindering eDemocracy. The 2017 ELF project “Digitalising Democracy: eParticipation” revealed that the eTools for formal participation such as eConsultations, eReferenda and ePetitions have been used with very limited scope, generally not meeting the public's expectations for a true civic input. Citizens and civic groups see their role as true contributors, rather than just addressees of state policies, and are increasingly using online tools for informal participation and governance scrutiny. Various platforms put pressure on decision-makers through requiring increased transparency and accountability. Such instruments empower citizens to take democratic action, enable them to participate, and gradually raise political acceptance of the eDemocracy itself.

Project objectives

Building on the knowledge of the various forms of online participation (see former ELF project on eDemocracy) this project aims to exchange and evaluate good practices for informal citizen eParticipation on local and national level across Europe. The ELF member organisations and third parties are expected to have shared knowledge to foster civic engagement and facilitate a true civic impact on the political decision-making through digital tools, ultimately leading to a more citizen's centric democracy, and a more transparent and accountable governance.

Workshop I:



The role of the digital citizen in the 21st century democracy

FRIDAY, 4 September 2020

ABOUT THE EVENT

Goal: The first workshop aims to provide an introduction into the topic of digital citizenship, online participation, and government scrutiny. Participants are supposed to provide and to get an overview of the state of play and the theoretic background of the topic(s).

Background: The information and communication technologies have touched upon practically every sphere of public life. On a daily basis, people are a part of complex, inclusive communication and decision-making processes related to both their personal and professional lives. The process of public governance and democracy-making, however, has been barely touched by this trend and is still referred to by politicians as an every four years recurring process. At the same time, democracies all across Europe face difficult times and citizen's rejection due to self-centricity of governance.

Digital tools do have the potential to bring a positive change by enabling greater public participation and engagement. Harnessing the power of the informal tools for public digital participation and channelling it for greater engagement and mobilisation for the achievement of political results (responsive, inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance) might be the key imperative for the well-working and enjoyed 21st century democracy.

Questions raised: How do ICT's alter people's self-perception of their societal role? To what extent can digital tools and eParticipation overcome the democratic deficit across Europe? How can we harness the potential of ICTs to achieve a more responsive, inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance and policy-making? Could informal tools for digital participation be seen as an alternative, rather than a supplement to the existing formal state-led eDemocracy tools?

EVENT SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, 4 September 2020

10.30 – 10.40 Technical and topical introduction by the moderator

10.40 – 10.50 Opening remarks



10.50 – 11.10 Theories and concepts on digital citizen-driven participation tools, Speaker TBC

11.10 – 11.40 How can we harness the potential of ICTs to achieve a more responsive, inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance and policy-making?

Discussion in breakout rooms.

11.40 – 12.20 Presentation & discussion of the results

12.20 – 12.30 Closing remarks

Moderation: Assya Kavrakova, Executive Director, ECAS

Workshop 2:

Harnessing digital tools for public action: Informal citizen participation at local level

TUESDAY, 8 September 2020

ABOUT THE EVENT

Goal: The second workshop aims to provide an overview on digital democracy tools applied at the local level. The workshop will outline some of the underlying characteristics of informal, citizens-led eParticipation at local level and will present good practices on a broad selection of topics. The commonalities between them all will be analysed and recommendations for the multiplication of the projects in other contexts/ countries will be discussed. The main input is expected to be given by the participants themselves to share initiatives and projects that they have experienced in the field.

Background: Citizen participation initiatives at local level are popular, as citizens can directly relate to the subject of decision-making. Often, those initiatives have a strong engagement rate due to the community / group mindset and the ability to mobilise on a concrete issue of personal and community interest. Compared with national initiatives, local initiatives can cover topics that are mostly much closer to citizens' everyday lives. This could enhance their outreach and lower the barrier for citizens to participate.



Questions raised: How can ICT's help to stimulate democracy on the local level? What are the success factors for such projects? To what extent should public administrations be involved in the process? What should be the output of such processes? What are best practices in the field that can be applied in other constituencies?

EVENT SCHEDULE

TUESDAY, 8 September 2020

10.30 – 10.40 Technical and topical introduction by the moderator (+introduction of the participants)

10.40 – 10.45 Opening remarks

10.45 – 11.20 Interventions by 4 participants presenting their projects/good practices

11.20 – 12.20 Open discussion:

What elements turn local digital democracy initiatives into success?

12.20 – 12.25 Concluding summary of the discussion by the moderator

12.25 – 12.30 Closing remarks

Moderation: Ivaylo Tsonev, Project Coordinator, FNF

Workshop 3:

Harnessing digital tools for public action: Informal citizen participation at national level

THURSDAY, 10 September 2020

ABOUT THE EVENT

Goal: The workshop will present various good practices for informal participation through digital technologies at national level as well as the key factors behind their success. This will allow the generalisation of trends, which will help the development of civic led digital initiatives



and the mobilisation of the general public. The main input is expected to be given by the participants themselves to share initiatives and projects that they have experienced in the field.

Background: Grass-roots citizen participation at national level targets national legislative and policy-execution process. The subject of those acts is either a particular social or economic group, or the society at large. A greater state openness, transparency, and accountability could ultimately improve the quality of policy-making due to the enhanced citizen scrutiny, in the best case – involvement. Compared with local initiatives, national projects can reach a wider audience and engage a bigger number of citizens. However, topics can possibly be further away from citizens' everyday lives.

Questions raised: How can ICT's help to stimulate democracy on the national level? What are the success factors for such projects? To what extent should public administrations be involved in the process? What should be the output of such processes? What are best practices in the field that can be applied in other constituencies? To what extent do the experiences differ from local level initiatives?

EVENT SCHEDULE

THURSDAY, 10 September 2020

- 10.30 – 10.40 Technical and topical introduction by the moderator (+introduction of the participants)
- 10.40 – 10.45 Opening remarks
- 10.45 – 11.20 Interventions by 4 participants presenting their projects/good practices
- 11.20 – 12.20 Open discussion:
What elements turn national digital democracy initiatives into success?
- 12.20 – 12.25 Concluding summary of the discussion by the moderator
- 12.25 – 12.30 Closing remarks

Moderation: Flavio Grazian, Participatory Democracy Manager, ECAS



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