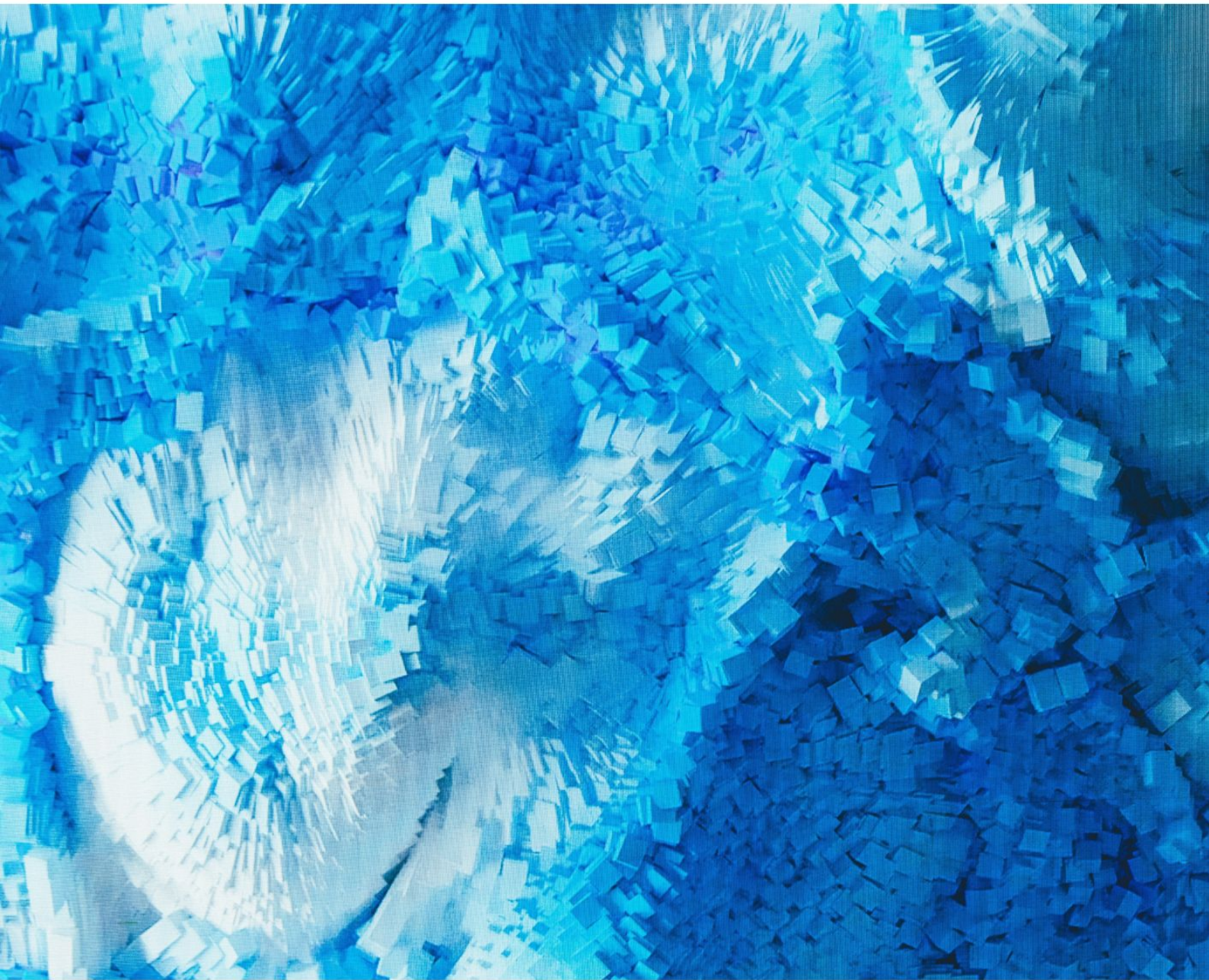




LEVEL UP

TRANSFORMING PARTICIPATORY AND
DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE



GAMIFYDEMOCRACY.ORG

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	1
The Challenge	3
Participatory and Deliberative Democracy Projects.....	3
The Role of European Citizens’ Panels	6
Our Method.....	8
Insights from Research	8
The Level Up Toolkit	10
Pilot Projects	12
Communication and Design	14
Lessons Learned	15
Implementation	16
Workload and Cost Considerations.....	18
Conclusion & Recommendations.....	19
Avenues for Further Implementation.....	22
References.....	23

Authors: Sašo Gorjanc, Johanna Jaschik, Iris Jugo Nuñez-Hoyo, Marie Martine, Jens Meijen, Toine Paulissen, Savannah-Rivka Powell, Lena Riecke, Sophie Vériter

Executive Summary

This policy report describes how to improve participatory and deliberative democracy (PDD) in the European Union (EU). It covers research on the challenges and gaps of existing methods for democratic engagement, outlines best practices, and makes concrete policy recommendations for one specific site of PDD: European Citizens Panels (ECPs). Our recommendations build on an original method to (re)connect citizens and communities with institutions that we developed and tested over 14 months: the Level Up Toolkit. Using elements of [gamification](#)¹, it makes democratic participation more inclusive, fun, and effective.

The Challenge

The EU grapples with a democratic deficit, wherein citizens perceive a gap between their influence on policy decisions and the EU's power. A large majority of EU citizens (92%) want their voices to be better taken into account by institutions (EU, 2021). Several PDD initiatives have sought to amend this deficit. ECPs, in particular, are promising avenues for strengthening democratic participation; however, room for improvement remains for them to reach their full potential. Our research shows they are still facing four main challenges (1) community-led initiation, (2) diversity and inclusion, (3) effective communication, and (4) genuine connections between participants.

Our Method

The Level Up Toolkit is a step-by-step guide to comprehensively address these challenges. It was field-tested and refined based on pilot projects. Participants found the process to be fun, engaging, connection enhancing, and empowering. The Toolkit is an innovative, flexible, and actionable method that can be used in a variety of contexts. We propose to use it in ECPs, as outlined below.

Recommendations

To improve the ECPs, we provide concrete recommendations with the objective to:

- Enable community-led initiation through multiple means of topic selection;
- Improve diversity and inclusion in their organisation and implementation;
- Improve their communication, transparency, and follow-up; and
- Improve connections across society.

Throughout the report, we refer to our website (www.gamifydemocracy.org) for more information. We invite you to follow our project on its social media platforms: [Instagram](#) (@gamifydemocracy), [LinkedIn](#) (Level Up), and [Twitter](#) (@HQLevelUp).

¹ "The main aim of gamification, i.e. the implementation of game design elements in real-world contexts for non-gaming purposes, is to foster human motivation and performance in regard to a given activity." (Sailer et al., 2017, pg. 371)

Introduction

From policy forums to dinner tables across Europe, it is widely believed that the EU is suffering from a democratic deficit (Neuhold, 2020)—whether real or perceived—between the EU’s considerable powers and its citizens’ relatively limited control over its decisions. EU-level policymakers can at times appear far removed from the public, as the majority of Europeans want to participate in democracy (Hierlemann and Emmanouilidis, 2022) but feel they cannot make an impact (Wike et al., 2022). Populists may exploit this dissatisfaction with democracy as a means of garnering public support and fostering anti-democratic sentiments (Berman, 2019).



Sources: EU, 2021; Hoffmann, 2021; Wike et al., 2022

Over the years, the EU has introduced several strategies to amend the democratic deficit, particularly through PDD. Several initiatives have begun bridging this gap, allowing citizens to better voice their concerns and needs. However, research shows that many still consider these processes tedious, unrepresentative, or ineffective (Vériter et al., 2021). They do not reach wide audiences, as many citizens simply do not know they exist (Hierlemann and Emmanouilidis, 2022). Projects like the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFEU) and its ECPs have emerged as promising but imperfect formats of democratic participation (Ellena, 2023). Despite the EU’s ‘citizen turn’, there is still room to improve PDD efforts to reach their full potential (Bailly, 2023).

Participatory democracy builds upon processes that allow citizens to take part in decision-making, enhancing their capacity to enact change and impact policies (Council of Europe [CoE], 2023a).

Deliberative democracy provides opportunities for citizens to influence governance through in-depth and inclusive decision-making (Peña-López, 2020).

A key challenge remains: PDD initiatives need not only to provide new effective forms of input for citizens, but also **inclusive** and **celebratory** spaces for people to genuinely **connect** across society.

To address this challenge, we designed and tested an original method of democratic participation that has proven to be inclusive, accessible, and fun: **the Level Up Toolkit**. It builds upon valuable processes already institutionalised in the EU, such as ECPs. Its key features are gamification and face-to-face interactions, with diverse and equitable participant engagement.

We suggest using the Toolkit as **a step-by-step manual on how to organise and run PDD events**. This model allows for flexible use, as organisations can take specific recommendations into account and tailor them to their needs. It is a resource for communities, organisations, and stakeholders at various levels of governance. Its flexibility ensures it can be used for community-led and institution-led policymaking. Therefore, it can respond well to the challenges of PDD projects and, particularly, improve the implementation of ECPs.



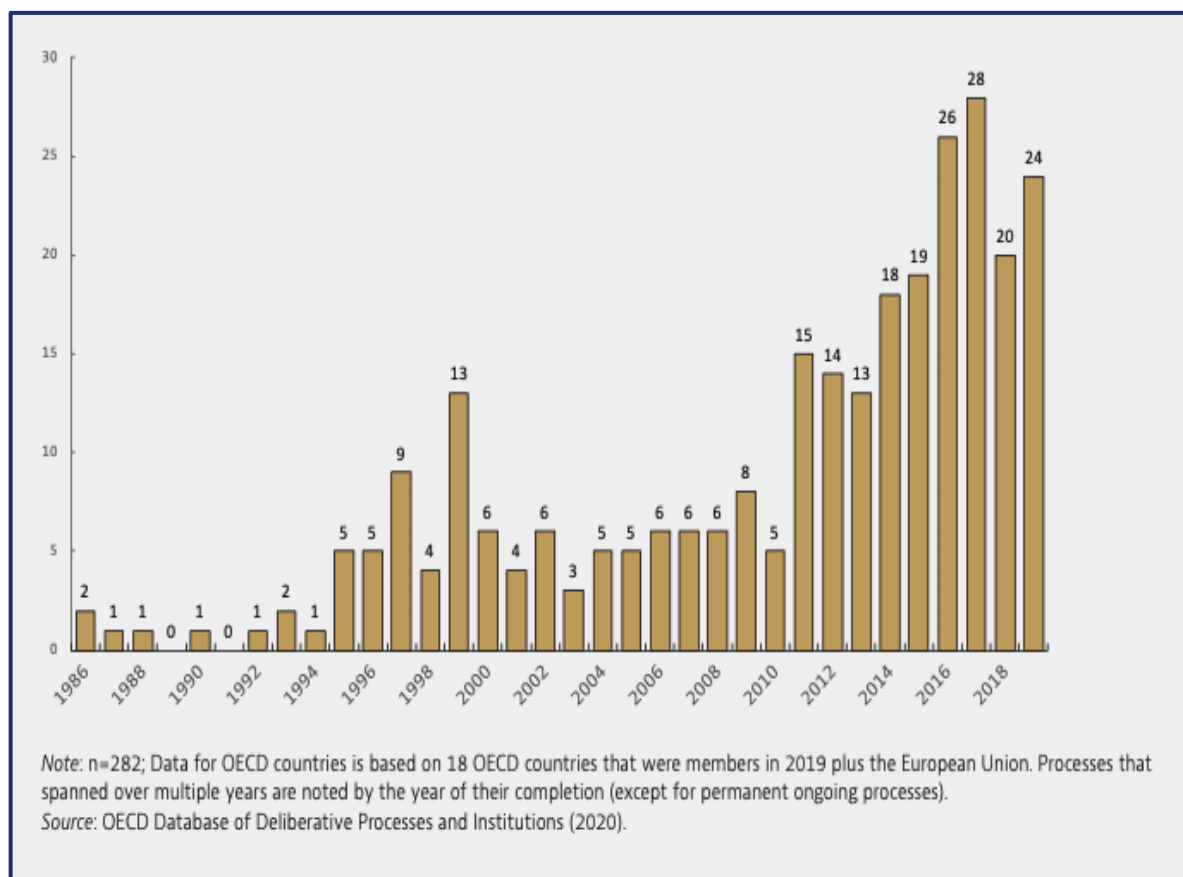
The Challenge

We reviewed over 300 sources documents and websites, including academic literature, policy guidelines, and reports, to understand the challenges encountered by PDD processes in Europe and the gaps they present. We also conducted interviews with industry experts, practitioners, and NGOs, in addition to forming an [Advisory Board](#)² to provide feedback and support.

Participatory and Deliberative Democracy Projects

Substantial research, projects, and initiatives contributing to PDD in Europe have flourished in what the OECD called a “deliberative wave” documenting nearly 300 projects in Figure 1 (Peña-López, 2020).

Figure 1: Number of Representative Deliberative Processes per year, 1988-2019



² <https://www.gamifydemocracy.org/about/#advisoryboard>

Among others, we analysed:

- digital inventories (e.g. [Citizen Engagement Navigator](#) (JRC), [BePART](#) (CoE), [SALTO Participation & Information](#))³
- digital tools and platforms ([MeetEU](#), [D-CENT](#), [CitizenLab](#), [Citizens Foundation](#), [beOpen](#))⁴
- non-governmental organisations and projects (e.g. [European Partnership for Democracy](#), [Phoenix](#), [Uplift](#), [The Good Lobby](#), [European Citizens Action Service](#))⁵
- events and forums (e.g. [World Forum for Democracy](#), [European Civic Forum](#))⁶
- research projects and centres (e.g. [EU Competence Centre on PDD](#), [EUI Democracy Forum](#), [Democracy and Participation in Europe Programme](#), [European Democracy Hub](#))⁷
- in-depth policy reports (e.g. [Alemanno, 2022](#) and [Abels et al., 2022](#))
- policy guidelines and codes of practice (e.g. [OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes](#), [Code of Practice for Civil Participation in Decision-Making](#))⁸
- citizens assemblies (e.g. [Conference on the Future of Europe](#))⁹

Table 1 below summarises our key findings from reports, policy documents, websites, and interviews with practitioners and project leaders.

³ <https://cop-demos.jrc.ec.europa.eu/navigator>; <https://bepartforum.org>; <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/participation>.

⁴ <https://meeteu.eu>; <https://dcentproject.eu/>; <https://www.citizenlab.co/en-gb>; <https://www.citizens.is>; <https://www.beopen-congress.eu>.

⁵ <https://epd.eu>; <https://phoenix-horizon.eu>; <https://uplift-youth.eu>; <https://www.thegoodlobby.eu>; <https://ecas.org>.

⁶ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/world-forum-democracy>; <https://civic-forum.eu>.

⁷ <https://cop-demos.jrc.ec.europa.eu>; <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/democracy-and-participation-in-europe>; <https://carnegieeurope.eu/specialprojects/europeandemocracyhub>.

⁸ <https://www.oecd.org/publications/oecd-guidelines-for-citizen-participation-processes-f765caf6-en.htm>; <https://rm.coe.int/code-of-good-practice-civil-participation-revised-301019-en/168098b0e2>.

⁹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/conference-future-europe_en

Table 1: Challenges and Lessons from PDD Projects

Challenges	Takeaways
<p>Low Public Engagement Difficulty reaching the wider public and particularly marginalised communities, resulting in limited engagement (Ieva, 2021).</p>	<p>Enhanced Outreach & Communication Investing in communication campaigns and selection procedures that engage diverse audiences, including randomised selection of participants and engagement with grassroots organisations.</p>
<p>Limited User-friendliness Digital tools are sometimes difficult to use or access, creating additional participation barriers (Mejia, 2022).</p>	<p>Digital Accessibility Designing and promoting interactive, open-access tools that are readily accessible to all segments of society, such as the multilingual platform used in the CoFEU.</p>
<p>Limited Design Impact Platforms and tools tend to have a formal design and branding, which does not always attract youth and disengaged audiences.</p>	<p>Celebration Creating expressive spaces and tools that celebrate democracy and provide opportunities for stimulating engagement.</p>
<p>Isolated Demographics Few platforms and tools have effective ways to engage with marginalised communities (OECD, 2023).</p>	<p>Diversity and Inclusion Recentring marginalised communities by creating safer spaces for the expression, listening, and inclusion of their voices along with measurable diversity targets.</p>
<p>Unclear Impact Difficulty determining what projects have achieved and how they have measured their impact on society (OECD, 2023)</p>	<p>Transparency Providing clear and measurable indicators of impact and methodologies that can easily be scrutinised and/or replicated by interested parties.</p>
<p>Digital Spaces Few projects propose regular, in-person interactions, which are more effective and preferred by youth (Katz et al., 2022; Bohns, 2017).</p>	<p>Real-Life Connection Offering spaces for in-person interactions and connection between various segments of society.</p>
<p>Difficulty for Community-led Contributions Challenges for the general public to initiate PDD processes and/or to influence themes of discussions (Vériter et al., 2021).</p>	<p>Adaptive Design Designing tools accessible to policymakers, stakeholders, NGOs, and the public to initiate processes and set discussion themes.</p>
<p>Disjointed Implementation General <i>ad-hoc</i> organisation and lack of follow-up with participants on the outcomes of their proposals (Youngs, 2023).</p>	<p>Systematic Follow-Up Institutionalising tools with clear follow-up procedures ensuring participants remain informed about how their proposals are reflected in policy change.</p>

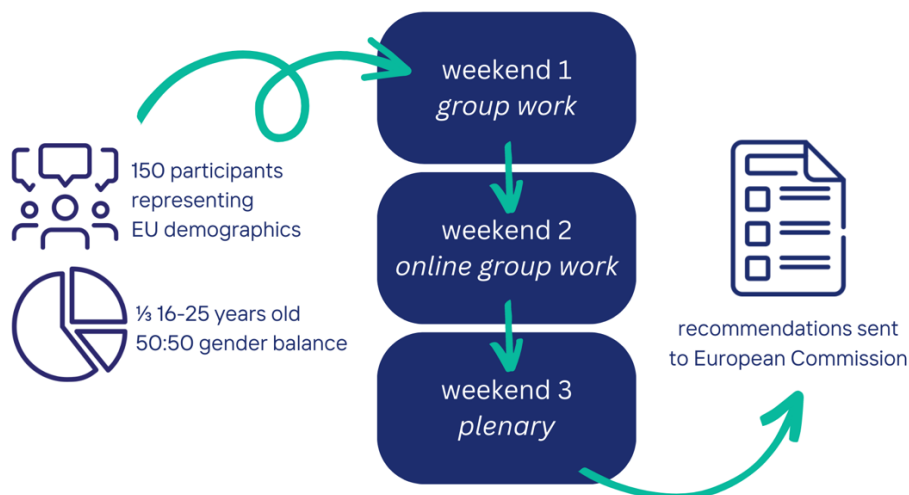
The Role of European Citizens' Panels

ECPs are a promising PDD model, as they bring together citizens to formulate recommendations on specific policy issues. ECPs have been praised for providing the public with opportunities to voice their concerns and impact political processes more directly, thereby improving democratic engagement (Alemanno, 2022). There are additional benefits for decision-makers, as this reinforces trust and accountability in institutions, while offering innovative modes of decision-making (Hierlemann and Huesmann, 2018).

Although ECPs are not the only mechanism for citizens participation in the EU, they are most often suggested by experts as a promising site for democratic transformation and already have the support of the European Commission (EC). Therefore, the recommendations in our report focus on ECPs as a particularly effective means of enhancing PDD due to their flexibility and potential to be institutionalised in various ways.

The EU convened the first ECPs within the framework of the CoFEU. After their positive reception, von der Leyen's State of the Union address promised to make ECPs a 'regular feature of democratic life' in the EU, while the Commission's work programme committed to establishing a 'new generation' of ECPs beyond the CoFEU (EC, 2022a; von der Leyen, 2022). These are intended to be either pan-European or smaller, more targeted panels on specified policy issues that aim to help the Commission meet its [Better Regulation](#) agenda¹⁰.

Between December 2022 and April 2023, the Commission organised three ECPs as part of its public consultation process on Food Waste (EC, 2023a), Virtual Worlds (EC, 2023c), and Learning Mobility (EC, 2023b). The produced recommendations are submitted to the Commission, which is said to feed into the public consultation procedure, following the steps represented in the infographic below (EC, 2023c). However, how it does so remains unclear (Greubel, 2022).



¹⁰ https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation_en

ECPs have been heralded as a new phase of democratic participation that places citizens at the heart of European democracy. However, civil society and experts underline that ECPs must address several challenges to reach their full potential. We identified four key areas for improvement of ECPs, in Table 2 below, based on the CoFEU report, ECP reports, think tank publications, EU statistics, and media reports. Ultimately, ECPs are relatively new to the EU and still in development, and have not yet been fully institutionalised in the EU framework (Ellena, 2023; Greubel, 2022; Petit, 2022). Whilst we acknowledge this issue, our final policy recommendations focus on the method of how ECPs are conducted improving their process to (re)connect citizens, institutions, and stakeholders in a more inclusive and celebratory manner.

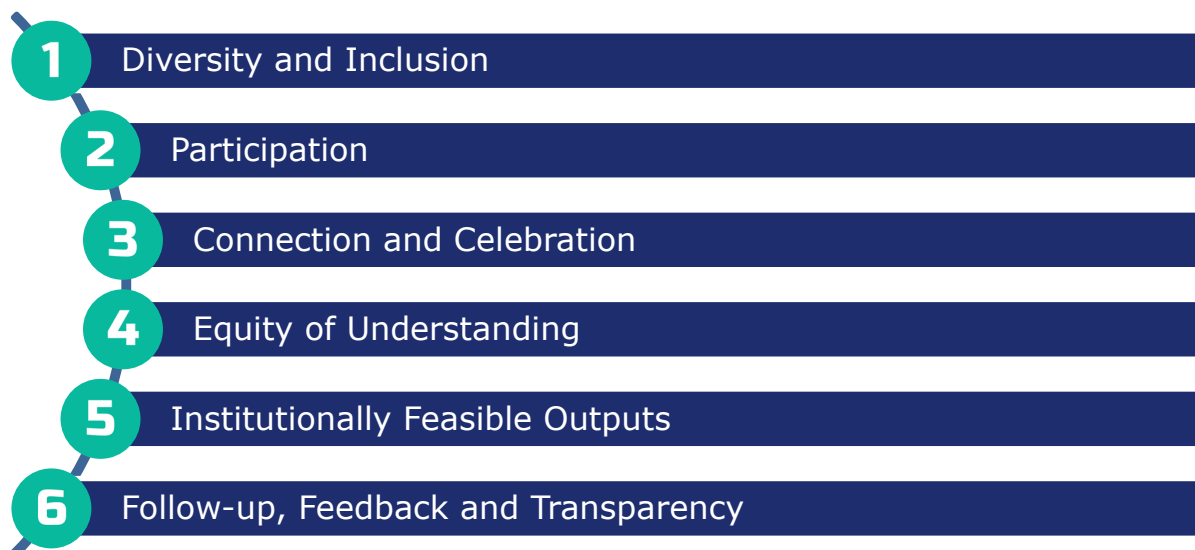
Table 2: Key challenges identified in relation to ECPs

Challenge 1	Experts highlighted the need for more citizen-led engagement opportunities, i.e. impetus coming directly from them. For example, the topic selection for current ECPs has been determined primarily by the Commission, with little opportunity for citizens to choose what policy issues should be discussed.
Challenge 2	Civil society organisations indicate that there are opportunities to make ECPs more inclusive , as the ECPs’ selection process does not adequately engage marginalised groups. For example, the exclusion of identity markers addressing ethnicity, non-binary genders, sexuality, ability/health, religion, and/or survivor status in the selection process limits diverse representation. The emphasis on citizens excludes 23.8 million people or 5.3% of the EU population who are citizens of non-member countries living in Europe. This demographic includes additionally marginalised individuals such as refugees and/or victims of human trafficking who are in dire need of support and representation.
Challenge 3	Citizens wish to see more transparency and follow-up on how EU institutions address the recommendations adopted by ECPs.
Challenge 4	Our interviews with experts and practitioners pointed out that ECPs have not fully succeeded in connecting citizens, stakeholders, and policy-makers in a way that generates mutual understanding and trust.

Sources: Citizens Take Over Europe, 2023; EC, 2022c; Ellena, 2023; Petit, 2022; Petit, 2023; Youngs, 2023.

Our Method

We identified areas of PPD processes needing improvement (Tables 1 & 2), which we translated into objectives to transparently measure the impact and success of our method, hence ensuring it can improve PDD processes.¹¹



Based on these objectives, we looked for insights in scientific literature and designed the Level Up Toolkit to address the areas needing improvement identified in our preliminary research. It can seamlessly be used in ECPs (see Table 3 below).

Insights from Research

Gamification promotes meaningful engagement of participants by strengthening motivation and interconnectedness (Sailer et al., 2017), while fostering higher participation and better learning outcomes (Sailer and Homner, 2020). It can thus be used as a tool to enhance participants' understanding of how democracy works and why it is so essential, which in turn increases democratic participation (Smets and Van Ham, 2013).

Insight 1

Integrating elements of gamification such as (limited) competitive aspects in game scenarios with clear stakes and objectives that emphasise collaboration and social interaction can enhance engagement in and the effectiveness of PDD processes.

¹¹ <https://www.gamifydemocracy.org/impact-assessment-2/>

The field of **citizen science** demonstrates the value of integrating citizen input into policies, as this results in more inclusive and sustainable output due to increased contextual and cultural awareness (Kimura and Kinchy, 2016). However, this relies heavily on the provision of an inclusive environment (Spasiano et al., 2021). To ensure this, we consulted research on **civic engagement of marginalised communities** and how processes that cultivate safer spaces can aid in bridging connections to establish political dialogue (Sun and Mietola, 2023).

Insight 2

Equalising the environment ensures participants' mutual understanding of relevant issues and procedures while engaging them in these processes. Informative and inclusive warm-up activities that disrupt hierarchical structures increase interest and knowledge thus allowing people to feel better equipped to engage, thereby producing more inclusive and sustainable policies.

Inclusive **facilitation techniques** are crucial to give all participants the chance to make their voices heard. It is a key factor in creating and maintaining a safer space with the optimal conditions for collaboration and trust. We therefore reviewed a range of existing facilitation techniques, including [Open Standards](#), [MARISCO](#), [Open Space Technology](#), [Fishbowl Discussions](#), and the [Art of Hosting](#)¹². Studies show that offering opportunities for small-group discussions between participants of diverse communities is an efficient way of improving engagement, producing more effective outputs and increasing inclusivity in democratic processes (Clark, 2020; Jung and Ro, 2019; Syed, 2019).

Insight 3

Using proven facilitation techniques helps to curate safer spaces (Fishbowl), foster honesty and empathy (OST), and create informal settings that promote collective creative outputs (Art of Hosting).

The literature on **preference elicitation** provides a framework to examine how participants can best prioritise their preferred policy proposals. Multi-option referendums (*preferendums*) offer more than two options for a given issue. This can deliver more appropriate and clear indications of support for specific proposals, encouraging consensus and reducing polarisation (McDaniels, 1996;

¹² <https://conservationstandards.org/>; <https://www.marisco.training/>; <https://openspaceworld.org/wp2/hho/papers/brief-users-guide-open-space-technology/>; <https://sparqtools.org/fishbowldiscussions-research/>; <https://artofhosting.org>.

Wagenaar, 2019; Tierney, 2012). These effects are amplified with efficient design choices, e.g. allowing voters to indicate their preferences among selected proposals by assigning them a descending score (*Borda* count). This scoring system results in the allocation of points, which ultimately identifies the most popular proposal(s).

Insight 4

Allowing participants to vote on the policy proposals they generated through a referendum increases the quality and effectiveness of interactions.

The Level Up Toolkit

We created the Level Up Toolkit based on the challenges of existing PDD initiatives, supported by insights gained from the literature, our Advisory Board, and interviews with practitioners. This section gives an overview of its structure while [our website](#) provides a comprehensive guide¹³.

The Level Up Toolkit has three key features:



Physical > Digital

We curate spaces for meaningful dialogues and creative output. In a world where online interactions are constant and offline connections are limited, we focus on physical encounters.



Gamification

It's not politics, it's fun.
Our approach uses gamification techniques to engage participants. At all levels, games and fun activities allow for more informal connections and effective outcomes.



Equity of Understanding

Our process bridges gaps between participants' knowledge, cultures, and needs. Emphasising empathy and humility, we create a level-playing field for meaningful engagement.

¹³ <https://www.gamifydemocracy.org/toolkit/>

The [Preparation Phase](#) provides guidelines for the organisation of PDD processes:



Group composition

A diverse set of participants ensures high-quality engagement. Our toolkit provides a distribution template and practical advice to achieve this.

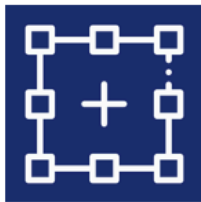
e.g. community members, civil society organisations (CSOs), institutional representatives, experts, relevant stakeholders,...



Topic selection

Multiple options for agenda-setting create opportunities for community-led *and* institution-led debates. Our toolkit proposes three clear procedures.

e.g. pre-participation survey, online platforms such as Have Your Say, agenda set by institutions based on priorities,...



Guidelines and briefing

The distribution of pre-event information and guidelines optimises interactions and understanding of the process.

e.g. DEI policy, Safer Space Guidelines, workshops with experts, ...

The **Connection Level** features activities that foster engagement and create links between a diverse group of participants in an interactive format. We identified four types of activities—(re)connection, communication, diversity & inclusion, and knowledge-sharing—which create meaningful bonds between participants and a mutual understanding of topic(s) under discussion (see [toolkit](#) for concrete examples).



The **Deliberation Level** organises participants into small groups discussing and jointly developing policy proposals. Setting a realistic scenario that encourages collaboration with clear stakes and objectives establishes a context for problem-solving. The groups then reconvene in a plenary to share their proposals and cast votes through a referendum (see toolkit for [examples](#)).



The **Creation Level** collectively celebrates the success of the groups by materialising outcomes into collective artistic objects or performances. We recommend Arts-Based Initiatives. Utilising art as a common language transcends boundaries and serves as a link between different groups, helps visualise abstract ideas, and supports the dissemination of proposals (see toolkit for example [initiatives](#)).



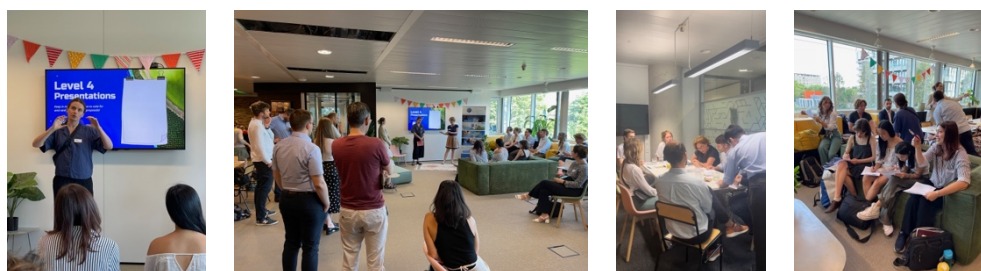
Pilot Projects

As our interviews highlighted the importance of the feasibility, impact, and replicability of our method, we used our budget to test it in two pilot projects. Due to limited resources, the pilots could not replicate ECPs yet showcased the flexibility and effectiveness of the Toolkit while gathering valuable feedback.

The **Madrid Pilot Project**¹⁴ (*Level Up Our School*) was organised from a grassroots perspective to test how 30 high school students and 8 local stakeholders (NGOs, political advisors, experts) could discuss environmental and social justice issues. Their recommendations were materialised into art projects.



The **Brussels Pilot Project**¹⁵ (*Level Up Our Climate Targets*) tied into an institutional procedure – DG CLIMA’s public consultation on the EU’s 2040 climate targets – and allowed us to test the use of our Toolkit among 30 participants including high-level policymakers, stakeholders, CSOs, community representatives, and citizens. Their proposals were sent to the EC, which collaborated in the organisation of the event.



The pilot projects showed that participants found the Level Up Toolkit to be adaptable, impactful, and engaging, while addressing the objectives to improve PDD processes identified at the start of this section (see here)¹⁶. In both cases, they produced detailed policy recommendations. We measured the impact of our Toolkit through pre- and post-event surveys which collected quantitative and qualitative feedback, summarised in Figures 2 and 3 below.

¹⁴ <https://www.gamifydemocracy.org/projects/level-up-our-school/>

¹⁵ <https://www.gamifydemocracy.org/projects/level-up-our-climate-targets/>

¹⁶ <https://www.gamifydemocracy.org/projects/level-up-our-climate-targets/#feedback;>
[https://www.gamifydemocracy.org/projects/level-up-our-school/#feedback.](https://www.gamifydemocracy.org/projects/level-up-our-school/#feedback)

Figure 2: Summary of participant’s feedback on the Madrid Pilot Project

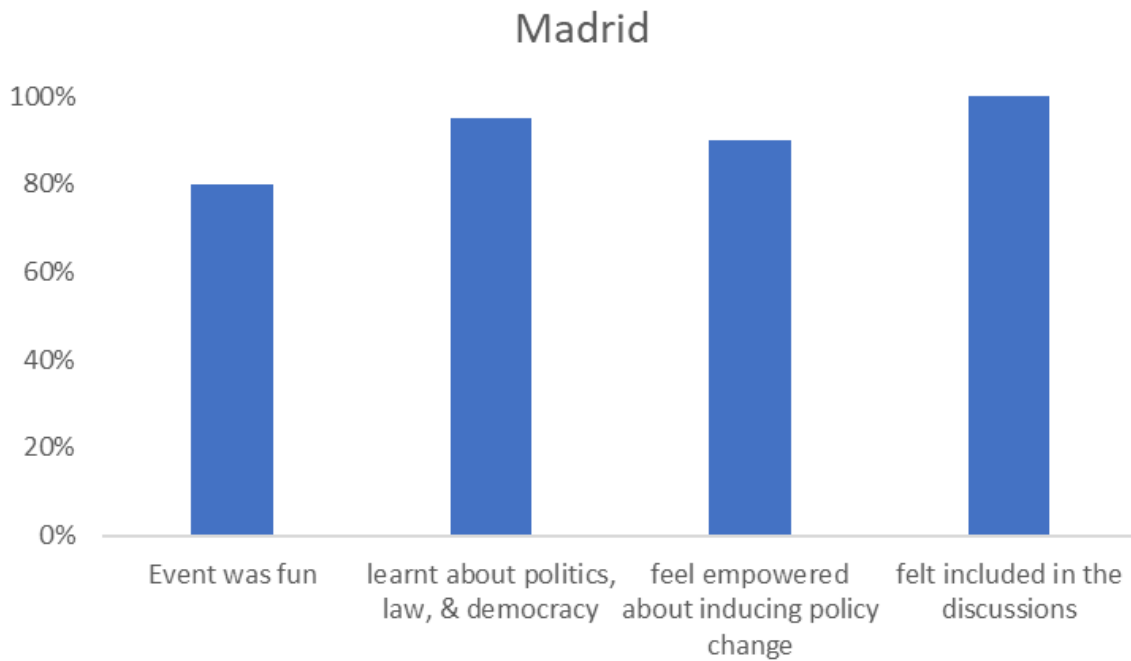
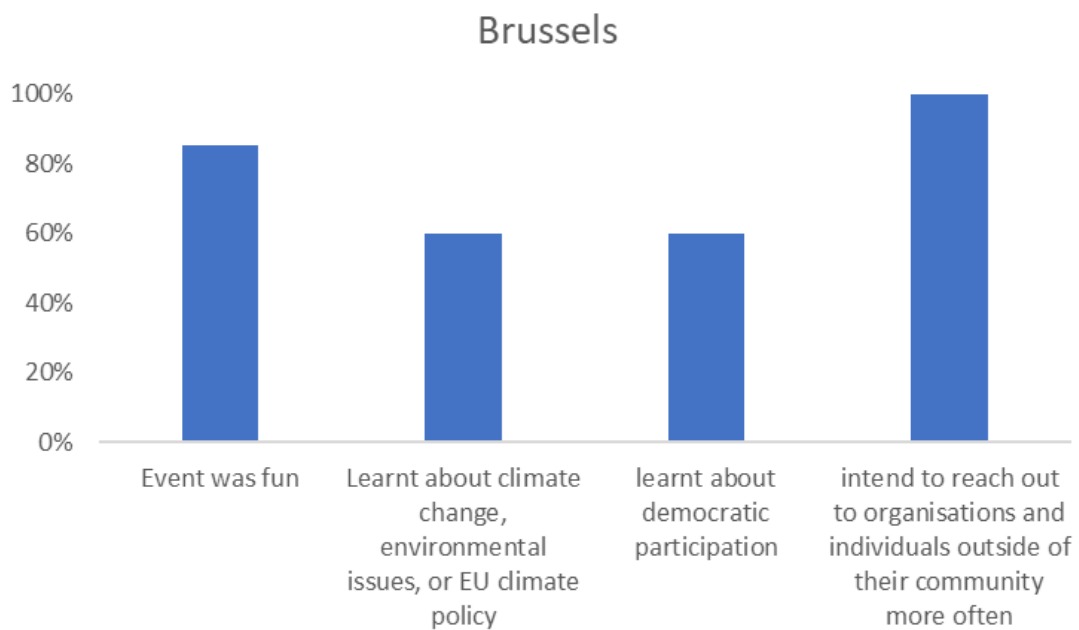


Figure 3: Summary of participant’s feedback on the Brussels Pilot Project



Communication and Design

Our research and interviews highlighted the importance of a solid communication and marketing strategy in addition to attractive branding reflecting the values of our project. Below are some examples of how we implemented this in our Brussels Pilot Project.

slides

role cards

level sheets

Lessons Learned

The pilot projects aided in refining the Toolkit and recommendations in this report. Our experience and the feedback received highlighted the following:

(A) Identifying, inviting, and ensuring the engagement of a wide variety of participants on equal footing is crucial.

In the Madrid pilot project, participants comprised of students and stakeholders, creating an artificial divide within the group. While in Brussels, it was difficult to engage high-level stakeholders. We thus encourage participants to come in as individuals, regardless of their backgrounds. Engaging the general public, policymakers, and stakeholders together not only helps to foster connection between those groups but also generates feasible proposals with a mutual sense of ownership and accountability.

(B) Assessing tangible impact is challenging but essential.

In our pilot projects, we could not assure the policy follow-up of proposals and struggled to collect in-depth feedback from participants. As a result, we adapted the feedback surveys and indicators measuring the effect of our Toolkit implementation, realising that building meaningful connections between participants was an end in itself.

(C) Lack of engagement of marginalised groups and more extensive testing.

Despite limited resources, constraining the organisation of pilot projects, we continue to refine the Toolkit based on feedback, actively engage with interested actors, and are planning more activities to expand its implementation. We are preparing a third pilot project with Roma communities, presenting our project at the World Forum on Democracy¹⁷, discussing implementation with a political group of the European Parliament, and directly engaging with other innovative initiatives such as the Democratic Odyssey¹⁸, and Education for Responsible Democratic Citizenship (DEMOCRAT)¹⁹.

¹⁷ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/world-forum-democracy>

¹⁸ <https://www.eui.eu/en/academic-units/school-of-transnational-governance/stg-projects/transnational-democracy-programme/the-democratic-odyssey>

¹⁹ <https://notus-asr.org/en/proyecto/democrat-3/>

Implementation

As an example of how the Level Up Toolkit can be implemented in the EU’s democratic landscape, we outline below how it can be used in the ECPs organised as part of the Commission’s public consultation procedure. Integrating the Level Up Toolkit in ECPs helps to address the areas of improvement identified earlier (Table 2). It is essential to note that this is merely one potential application of the Toolkit, as it is a flexible method of participation that could be implemented at multiple governance levels, from local to global. Beyond ECPs, it could provide guidelines for state-led, civil society-led, and business-led community engagement. A detailed version of the Level Up Toolkit, including many different implementation options, is available on our [website](#).

Table 3: Roadmap to Implement the Level Up Toolkit in ECPs

ECP structure	Level Up Toolkit	Recommended Changes (<i>what</i>)	Practicalities (<i>how</i>)	Targets (<i>why</i>)
Pre-event	Preparation Phase	<u>Group composition</u> : we recommend mixed groups (diverse citizens, experts, stakeholders, CSOs, institutions) that are partially randomly selected and partially invited to compensate for gaps and biases.	We recommend including citizens (60%), experts (10%), stakeholders (10%), CSOs (10%), and institutional representatives (10%).	Challenge 2 & 4 (Table 2).
		<u>Topic selection</u> : we recommend 3 different agenda-setting methods.	A. set by institution (50%) B. set by civil society via platform, e.g. Have Your Say (25%) C. set by participants’ selection through a pre-event survey (25%)	Challenge 1 (Table 2).
		<u>Guidelines and Briefing</u> : we recommend all participants and facilitators receive guidance prior to the event.	Training package for facilitators & participants, including Safe(r) to Braver Spaces Guidelines and information about what to expect. Example here .	Challenges 2 & 4 (Table 2).

Weekend 1: Topic definition & work in small groups	Level 1: Connection	Gamified activities for the group among four silos: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Re)connection • Communication • Diversity/Inclusion • Knowledge-Sharing 	Examples of games and activities are available in the detailed Toolkit on our website, here .	Challenges 2 & 4 (Table 2).
	Level 2: Deliberation	Allocation of participants into small groups (8-12) to develop collective proposals. We recommend two different methods.	A. Open Space Technology method: grouping of ideas proposed by participants B. Random allocation to ensure “ideal” composition in each group in a time efficient manner (e.g. pre-event).	Challenges 1 & 4 (Table 2).
Weekend 2: Deliberation in small groups	Level 2: Deliberation	Groups develop policy proposals through a scenario with clear stakes and objectives that gamifies the process of policy-making.	Several levels and challenges guide groups through real-life limitations such as budgetary constraints. Example games and scenarios used in our pilot projects are available here .	Challenges 1 & 4 (Table 2).
Weekend 3: Plenary	Level 2: Deliberation	Reconvening in a plenary, groups present their proposals and engage in Q&A to debate them.	Different presentation options are available. Example presentations used in our pilot projects can be found on our website, here ²⁰ .	Challenges 1 & 4 (Table 2).
	Level 2: Deliberation	Participants rank their preferred proposals individually through a referendum.	Votes are cast anonymously. Examples are available here ²¹ .	Challenge 3 (Table 2).

²⁰ <https://www.gamifydemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/BRUSSELS-POLICY-PROPOSALS.docx.pdf>;
<https://www.gamifydemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Madrid-Proposals.pdf>.

²¹ <https://www.gamifydemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/BRUSSELS-POLICY-PROPOSALS.docx.pdf>;
<https://www.gamifydemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Madrid-Proposals.pdf>.

	Level 3: Creation	Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) allow participants to visualise their proposals through creative outputs, while further fostering connection and networking across social groups.	Examples of ABIs are available on our website, here .	Challenge 3 (Table 2).
Post-event	Level 3: Creation	Proposals and creative outputs are integrated into online and/or physical platforms to enhance networking, dissemination, and follow-up.	Non-exhaustive list of examples: A. <i>Have Your Say</i> website B. Exhibition in Public Spaces C. Exhibition in EU institutions D. Level Up Website	Challenge 3 (Table 2).
	Level 3: Creation	Sustained communication with participants, including feedback collection. Optional extension of the referendum to a wider audience allowing a broader community (beyond ECP participants) to make their voices heard.	E-mail communication and digital EU platforms such as <i>Have Your Say</i> .	Challenge 3 (Table 2).

Workload and Cost Considerations

The implementation of the Toolkit as part of ECPs (and in other PDD processes) is associated with a considerable workload for the organisers. In the Preparation Phase, additional work is required to produce and distribute pre-event surveys, guidelines, and informational materials, in addition to selecting and inviting institutional representatives, experts, stakeholders, and civil society organisations. What remains is the re-organisation of processes and re-allocation of resources, which we estimate could increase the expected costs of such events. However, we project that the slight increase in costs and workload will ultimately result in substantial long-term benefits for all segments of society, including institutions and the public.

Conclusion & Recommendations

One of the most pressing challenges for the EU is its democratic deficit (perceived or real), reflecting a disconnect between its institutions and citizens. We discussed how existing PDD projects designed to amend that disconnect are valuable and worthwhile but may fall short in certain areas. Our research shows that ECPs offer a promising model to directly engage citizens in the EU's political processes. However, it additionally highlighted the need for ECPs to ensure more citizen-led engagement possibilities, improve inclusivity and diversity, increase transparency, and expand opportunities for meaningful connection. Our policy recommendations outline how to strengthen ECPs in these key areas.

The [Level Up Toolkit](#) summarised above offers a step-by-step guide on how to make participatory and deliberative democracy processes more engaging, inclusive, celebratory, and transparent. We refer to it here as a roadmap to improve ECPs according to our four recommendations. However, the Toolkit can also be applied to other processes of community engagement, private or public.

1. Enable Community-led Topic Selection

Challenge: Citizens desire opportunities to set the agenda for ECPs and thereby give more direct input to the policy-making process.

Recommendation: Using a tripartite ECP topic selection process:



Community-sourced: Topics for 25% of ECPs should be suggested by CSOs and community stakeholders on a rolling basis. Topic proposals should be disseminated digitally, e.g., on the 'Have Your Say' platform. Citizens can rank these proposals, e.g., using a digital [preferendum](#) voting procedure. ECPs are organised on the topics of highest rank.



Citizen-sourced: Topics for 25% of ECPs should be determined by surveying participants following their selection. Our pilot projects underline that surveys are an effective method for citizen-led agenda setting.



Institution-sourced: Institutions should pre-select topics for 50% of ECPs, for example as a permanent part of the Commission's public consultation procedure or in follow-up conferences to the CoFEU.

Suggested change-makers: Colin Scicluna (Commissioner Šuica's Cabinet Member, responsible for CoFEU follow-up) and Director-General Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen (DG COMM)

2. Improve Diversity and Inclusion

Challenge: Marginalised groups remain underrepresented in ECPs, despite random selection and diversity indicators.

Recommendation: Strengthening inclusivity and representation in ECPs by diversifying their composition is essential. This can be achieved by reducing barriers to participation and creating a welcoming environment for people from marginalised communities:

- A** Participants should include community stakeholders and CSOs led by and for marginalised communities. Transparent criteria should be used for their selection (see our guidelines [here](#)).
- B** A DEI Policy should be adopted by the facilitators of ECPs and communicated to all participants (see example [here](#)).
- C** Setting and measuring diversity targets with continuous reflection for improvement. ECPs should have regularly updated targets.
- D** DEI experts should work in conjunction with topic experts of ECPs to equalise understanding while ensuring meaningful representation and inclusion.

Suggested change-makers: Alison Crabb (DG EMPL, Unit Disability & Inclusion, EMPL.D3) and Vesna Loncaric (Commissioner Šuica's Cabinet Member, responsible for equality)

3. Boost Transparency, Follow-up, & Communication

Challenge: Insufficient transparency regarding what happens after ECPs conclude persists, contributing to the erosion of public trust. Limited dissemination and formal communication hampers their reach, impact, and perceived legitimacy.

Recommendations: Clearly communicating through innovative and creative means:



Generated policy proposals should be subject to a referendum. Our research and pilot projects show that this provides invaluable information on levels of public acceptance and is the basis for follow-up procedures.



Art-Based Initiatives should be made integral to ECPs to make policy proposals more tangible (see examples [here](#)). This creates space for different actors to connect in equal and dialogic ways beyond the institutional realm. Creative output should be showcased in digital platforms and physical exhibitions.



Recommendations created during ECPs should be disseminated through a centralised interactive platform (e.g., '[Have Your Say](#)'), with status indicators (e.g. introduced, considered, rejected, altered, accepted).



Communication campaigns should be designed to showcase the impact of ECPs with tangible stories that are accessible and relatable to most people, using innovative marketing strategies and User-Generated Content.



ECP processes and their outputs should be subjected to an impact assessment based on transparently defined objectives (see suggestions [here](#)).

Suggested change-makers: Joachim Ott, DG COMM, Unit Citizens' Dialogues (COMM.C3) and Iris Abraham (Commissioner Šuica's Cabinet Member responsible for communications)

4. Improve connections between citizens, institutions, and stakeholders

Challenge: Disconnect between institutions and communities persists, leading to distrust and miscommunication.

Recommendations: Bridging the gap between social groups through engaging practices:



ECPs should include citizens, CSOs, experts, stakeholders, and policymakers (see suggested composition [here](#)). Particularly, expert input into debates is crucial, to ensure all participants are informed and included. Both pilot projects demonstrated that including these groups led towards better mutual understanding (60-95% of participants reported better understanding following the event).



ECP participants should engage in a selection of value-based games (see examples [here](#)). This builds a basis for equitable and honest engagement, reducing the risk of the process being co-opted. Our Madrid pilot project demonstrated that 80% of participants enjoyed the event and 95% felt empowered through gamified activities.



ECP deliberations should be structured and facilitated. Our Brussels pilot project showed that participants meaningfully engaged and collaborated, building trust and sharing expertise. Facilitated knowledge-sharing built connections as an end in itself. Consequently, participants developed detailed and institutionally feasible policy proposals.

Suggested change-makers: Theo Duivenwoorde, DG EAC, Unit Stakeholder Engagement & Programme Impact (EAC.A.3) and Deša Srsen (Commissioner Šuica's Deputy Head of Cabinet, responsible for interinstitutional relations and outreach)

Avenues for Further Implementation

While our report focuses on strengthening the process of ECPs rather than how to include them in the EU's policy-making cycle, various EU institutions could integrate our policy recommendations (for example, in a permanent EU Citizens Assembly that feeds into the legislative process of various EU institutions). We suggest that the Commission adopt our policy recommendations in organising future ECPs, incorporating our Toolkit as an exemplary method enabling them to best fulfil their objectives.

References

- ABELS, G., CRUM, B., ALEMANN, A., DEMIDOV, A., HIERLEMANN, D., RENKAMP, A. & TRECHSEL, A. 2022. Next level citizen participation in the EU: Institutionalising European Citizens' Assemblies.
- ALEMANN, A. 2022. Towards a permanent citizens' participatory mechanism in the EU.
- ART OF HOSTING. *Art of Hosting and harvesting conversations that matter* [Online]. Available: <https://artofhosting.org/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- BERTELSMANN STIFTUNG. *More Participation for a citizen centered Europe* [Online]. Available: <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/democracy-and-participation-in-europe> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- BOHNS, V. 2017. A face-to-face request is 34 times more successful than an email. *Harvard business review*, 11, 1-3.
- CARNEGIE EUROPE. 2023. *European Democracy Hub* [Online]. Brussels. Available: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/specialprojects/europeandemocracyhub> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- CITIZEN LAB. 2023. *Your dedicated community engagement platform, backed by a team of experts* [Online]. Available: <https://www.citizenlab.co/en-gb> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- CITIZENS FOUNDATION ICELAND. *Citizens Foundation: Platforms and AI empowering citizens and governments* [Online]. Reykjavik. Available: <https://www.citizens.is/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- CITIZENS TAKE OVER EUROPE. 2023. *Statement on the European Citizens' Panels* [Online]. Available: <https://citizenstakeover.eu/blog/statement-on-the-european-citizens-panels/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- CLARK, T. R. 2020. *The 4 stages of psychological safety: Defining the path to inclusion and innovation*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- CONCIL OF EUROPE 2019. Code of good practice for civil participation in the decision-making process: Revised. *Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe*.
- CONSERVATION STANDARDS. *About conservation standards: Helping conservation teams achieve lasting impact* [Online]. Available: <https://conservationstandards.org/about/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].

- COUNCIL OF EUROPE. *bEOpen: Open Local Government and Public Ethics: welcome to bE-Open* [Online]. Available: <https://www.beopen-congress.eu/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- COUNCIL OF EUROPE. 2022. *BePART: Civil Participation Forum* [Online]. Available: <https://bepartforum.org/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- COUNCIL OF EUROPE. 2023a. *About participatory democracy: What is participatory democracy and why is it important?* [Online]. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/participatory-democracy/about-participatory-democracy> [Accessed 24.8.2023 2023].
- COUNCIL OF EUROPE. 2023b. *World Forum for Democracy 2023* [Online]. Available: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/world-forum-democracy> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- D-CENT. *Technologies for 21st century democracy* [Online]. Available: <https://dcentproject.eu/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- DANISH BOARD OF TECHNOLOGY. *EU Citizens' Panels - A New Phase of Citizen Engagement* [Online]. Hvidovre. Available: <https://tekno.dk/project/european-citizens-panels/?lang=en> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- ELLENA, S. 2023. EU citizens' panels likely to stay, but need to be adapted, experts say. *EURACTIV.com*.
- EUROPEAN CITIZEN ACTION SERVICE. 2023. *The European Citizen Action Service* [Online]. Brussels. Available: <https://ecas.org/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- EUROPEAN CIVIC FORUM. *ECF Statement: European Commission Rule of Law Report 2023* [Online]. Brussels. Available: <https://civic-forum.eu/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION. *Better Regulation: why and how* [Online]. Brussels: Directorate-General for Communication. Available: https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation_en [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 2022a. *Commission work programme 2023* [Online]. Brussels: Directorate-General for Communication. Available: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-documents/commission-work-programme/commission-work-programme-2023_en [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 2022b. *Conference on the Future of Europe* [Online]. Brussels: Directorate-General for Communication. Available: <https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019->

- [2024/new-push-european-democracy/conference-future-europe_en](#) [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 2022c. *Statistics on migration to Europe* [Online]. Brussels: Directorate-General for Communication. Available: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe_en [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 2023a. *European Citizens' Food Waste Panel: A new phase of citizen engagement* [Online]. Brussels: Directorate-General for Communication. Available: https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/food-waste-panel_en [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 2023b. *European Citizens' Learning Mobility Panel: A new phase of citizen engagement* [Online]. Brussels: Directorate-General for Communication. Available: https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/learning-mobility-panel_en [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 2023c. *European Citizens' Panels: A new phase of citizen engagement* [Online]. Brussels: Directorate-General for Communication. Available: https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/index_en [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP FOR DEMOCRACY. *European Democracy Hub* [Online]. Brussels. Available: <https://epd.eu/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- EUROPEAN UNION. 2021. Special Eurobarometer 517 Future of Europe [Online]. Brussels. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2554>
- EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE. 2023. *EUI-STG Democracy Forum* [Online]. San Domenico di Fiesole. Available: <https://www.eui.eu/en/academic-units/school-of-transnational-governance/stg-projects/transnational-democracy-programme/the-forum-on-democratic-participation-and-the-future-of-europe> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- EUVSDISINFO. 2019. 5 Common Pro-Kremlin Disinformation Narratives [Online]. Available: <https://euvsdinfo.eu/5-common-pro-kremlin-disinformation-narratives/>
- FONDAZIONE GIANGAICOMO FELTRINELLI. 2023. *Phoenix: The Rise of Citizen Voices for a Greener Europe* [Online]. Available: <https://phoenix-horizon.eu/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- GREUBEL, J. 2022. A new generation of European Citizens' Panels—Making citizens' voices a regular part of policymaking, European Policy Centre (EPC) Discussion Paper, October 2021.

- HIERLEMANN, D. & EMMANOUILIDIS, J. 2022. *The Missing Piece: A Participation Infrastructure for EU Democracy*. BertelsmannStiftung.
- HIERLEMANN, D. & HUESMANN, C. 2018. *European Citizens' Panel on the future of Europe* Bertelsmann Stiftung Evaluation Report.
- HOFFMANN, I. 2021. *Democracy and the Rule of Law in the European Union*. eupinions #2021/1. Bertelsmann Stiftung; Gutersloh.
- IBISCH, P. L. & HOBSON, P. R. 2014. MARISCO: adaptive Management of vulnerability and RiSk at COnservation sites. *A guidebook for risk-robust, adaptive and ecosystem-based conservation of biodiversity*. Centre for Econics and Ecosystem Management, Eberswalde.
- IEVA, C. 2021. *Citizen Participation Guidelines For Centre for EU Transport Project (CEUTP) beneficiaries/investors*.
- JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE. *Community of Practice of the Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy* [Online]. Available: <https://cop-demos.jrc.ec.europa.eu/navigator> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- JUNG, H. & RO, E. 2019. Validating common experiences through focus group interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 143, 169-184.
- KATZ, R., OGILVIE, S., SHAW, J. & WOODHEAD, L. 2022. *Gen Z, explained: The art of living in a digital age*, University of Chicago Press.
- KIMURA, A. H. & KINCHY, A. 2016. Citizen science: Probing the virtues and contexts of participatory research. *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*, 2, 331-361.
- MCDANIELS, T. L. 1996. The structured value referendum: Eliciting preferences for environmental policy alternatives. *Journal of policy Analysis and Management*, 15, 227-251.
- MEETEU. 2023. *Hey Europe, Can We Talk?* [Online]. Available: <https://meeteu.eu/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- MEJIA, M. 2022. *OECD Guidelines-for citizen participation processes Highlights*.
- MUDDE, C. & ROVIRA KALTWASSER, C. (2017). *Populism: a very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- NEUHOLD, C. 2020. Democratic deficit in the European Union. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.
- OECD. 2023. *OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes* [Online]. Available: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/oecd-guidelines-for-citizen->

- [participation-processes f765caf6-en;jsessionid=Erok1mZva3dRiyJemvSKy-uXIEkf7ueZ6do4ASM0.ip-10-240-5-189](https://participation-processes.f765caf6-en;jsessionid=Erok1mZva3dRiyJemvSKy-uXIEkf7ueZ6do4ASM0.ip-10-240-5-189) [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- OWEN, H. A *Brief User's Guide to Open Space Technology* [Online]. OpenSpaceWorld.org. Available: <https://openspaceworld.org/wp2/hho/papers/brief-users-guide-open-space-technology/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- PEÑA-LÓPEZ, I. 2020. Innovative citizen participation and new democratic institutions: Catching the deliberative wave.
- PETIT, P. 2022. *In EU Citizens' Panels, the institutions must not leave citizens behind* [Online]. Brussels: European Policy Centre. Available: <https://www.epc.eu/en/publications/In-EU-Citizens-Panels-the-institutions-must-not-leave-citizens-behin~4d3794> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- PETIT, P. 2023. *EU-level citizens' participation needs wider institutional support* [Online]. Brussels: European Policy Centre. Available: <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/EU-level-citizens-participation-needs-wider-institutional-support~51c980> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- SAILER, M., HENSE, J. U., MAYR, S. K. & MANDL, H. 2017. How gamification motivates: An experimental study of the effects of specific game design elements on psychological need satisfaction. *Computers in human behavior*, 69, 371-380.
- SAILER, M. & HOMNER, L. 2020. The gamification of learning: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 32, 77-112.
- SALTO. *SALTO Participation & Information* [Online]. Available: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/participation/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- SMETS, K. & VAN HAM, C. 2013. The embarrassment of riches? A meta-analysis of individual-level research on voter turnout. *Electoral studies*, 32, 344-359.
- SPASIANO, A., GRIMALDI, S., BRACCINI, A. M. & NARDI, F. 2021. Towards a transdisciplinary theoretical framework of citizen science: results from a meta-review analysis. *Sustainability*, 13, 7904.
- STANFORD SPARQ. *Fishbowl Discussions: Toolkit* [Online]. Stanford: Department of Psychology. Available: <https://sparqtools.org/fishbowldiscussions-research/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- SUNI, A. & MIETOLA, R. 2023. 'Dear colleagues, I ask you to act like adults': minority youth and their political participation. *Journal of youth studies*, 26, 213-228.
- SYED, M. 2019. *Rebel ideas: The power of diverse thinking*, Hachette UK.

- THE GOOD LOBBY. 2023. *We democratise lobbying to make our political system more equal* [Online]. Brussels. Available: <https://www.thegoodlobby.eu/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- TIERNEY, S. 2012. The multi-option referendum: international guidelines, international practice and practical issues. *Edinburgh School of Law Research Paper*.
- TRUAN, N. (2019). Talking about, for, and to the People: Populism and Representation in Parliamentary Debates on Europe. *Zeitschrift Für Anglistik Und Amerikanistik*, 67(3), 307–337. <https://doi.org/10.1515/zaa-2019-0025>
- UPLIFT. *Young people's voices at the centra of Youth Policy* [Online]. Available: <https://uplift-youth.eu/> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].
- VERITER, S., LOLACHER, J., MARTINS, A. & TSE, L. 2021. Democracy. *Europe's Stories Project*. St Anthony's College, Oxford.
- VON DER LEYEN, U. 2022. 2022 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen. *State of the Union 2022*.
- WAGENAAR, C. C. 2019. Beyond for or against? Multi-option alternatives to a corrective referendum. *Electoral Studies*, 62, 102091.
- WIKE, R., SILVER, L., FETTEROLF, J., HUANG, C., AUSTIN, S., CLANCY, L. & GUBBALA, S. 2022. Social media seen as mostly good for democracy across many nations, but US is a major outlier. *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project*. Retrieved January, 27, 2023.
- YOUNGS, R. 2023. *EU Democracy After the Conference on the Future of Europe* [Online]. Brussels: Carnegie Europe. Available: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/05/12/eu-democracy-after-conference-on-future-of-europe-pub-87110> [Accessed 24.8. 2023].