



European Committee
of the Regions



EU Citizens' Consultations: What's next?

Grassroots examples - European prospects

European Committee of the Regions

April – May 2019

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Key results of the series of five lunchtime seminars on the future of citizen engagement

A. Background information

Since March 2016, the CoR has been active in the "Reflecting on Europe/Future of Europe" campaign, providing a platform for regions, cities and their citizens to engage in the debate on the future of Europe. In December 2018, a new concept of **permanent structured dialogue mechanism** was proposed for discussion by the presidents of the CoR and EESC. The call for a reinforced link between the EU and its citizens was reaffirmed by the [Bucharest Declaration](#) in March 2019. The CoR is thus in the process of designing its "European Citizens' Consultations" model, a more permanent and structured format, combined with a feedback mechanism aiming to better include the local level in the EU decision-making process.

In order to prepare for this new model, a series of lunchtime seminars was held at the CoR with experts and practitioners from different levels of government (local, regional, national, European), aimed at collecting insights on citizen engagement and concrete results of successful initiatives. The efforts of the CoR to better engage citizens in the decision-making process have been highlighted by the European Commission in its recent [Communication "Europe in May 2019"](#), which calls for a permanent dialogue with citizens – which is exactly what the CoR is trying to achieve.

B. The series of lunchtime seminars in a nutshell

- Five 90-minute seminars organised in April-May 2019 on the topic of citizen engagement, followed by networking lunches: 4 April, 9 April, 11 April, 24 April & 7 May;
- 18 experts providing concrete input from a municipal (Madrid, Paris, Gdansk), regional (Baden-Württemberg, Italian regional parliaments, German-Speaking Community of Belgium), national (Estonia, Ireland), European (European Movement, Eurocities, CEMR, European Commission) and academic (OECD, EPC, Bertelsmann) perspective;
- The discussions with panellists in each seminar were centred around three main research questions, namely the selection of citizens, the selection of topics for discussion and the inclusion of the results into the decision-making process;
- There were an average of 30-40 participants in the room during the debate;

- Three questions were asked to participants in each seminar using Sli.do, an online voting tool. Results indicate that most respondents (60%) were not in favour of selecting a fixed number of topics for citizens' assemblies in advance at EU level. Additionally, 80% agreed that citizens taking part in EU consultations should statistically mirror the population of the city/region where they take place. Finally, a large majority (85%) found it important that EU citizens' consultations are carried out in cooperation between EU institutions;
- Promotion of the seminars on all CoR social media channels (Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn), as well as live streaming on the webpage of the campaign and on Facebook. Altogether, more than 54 000 users were reached, and the posts on Facebook generated more than 3 100 likes, comments and shares. The livestreams reached almost 46 000 viewers and created more than 1 300 likes, comments and shares. The last livestream (boosted via a paid campaign) reached almost 43 000 users and generated more than 1 100 engagements; it was seen in its entirety over 4 600 times.

C. Main findings

The main findings of the seminars are summarised below, ordered around the three main questions asked to panellists.

- **How should citizens be selected for citizens' assemblies?**

The first question to panellists related to the way(s) used to select participants in citizens' assemblies. One emerging message is the need to ensure diversity among participants and representativeness of the area where the assembly takes place, using criteria such as gender, age, demography or socio-economic status. Given that full representativeness will be difficult to achieve, organisers should aim for maximum diversity among participants.

On the selection process itself, it appears that different methods of selection would lead to different outputs, an aspect that should be taken into account when designing consultations. For instance, a random selection process led by an independent company would guarantee more transparency than a selection orchestrated by the local/regional government. In any case, it is interesting to keep a record of participants to see who was involved in the process.

In some cases, citizens were remunerated for their participation in citizens' assemblies. In terms of the online vs. offline assemblies, a good balance between online and physical participation is crucial to coming up with relevant solutions.

- **What is the best method to select topic(s) for discussion?**

There are two main approaches to select topics for a citizens' assembly:

- Top-down approach: the topic(s) are selected in advance by the organisers and communicated to the participants. The main benefit of a pre-defined list of topics is the comparability of results. Still, some flexibility is needed to take into account the specific needs of each city/region;
- Bottom-up approach: citizens decide on the topics and set up the agenda of the citizens' assembly. For the citizens' assemblies to be effective, the bottom-up selection of topics must be done in advance of the first meeting. In East Belgium, citizens' participation is organised in two levels: first, the citizens' assembly, then the citizens' council (restricted, but from the same members) and the topics are chosen by the latter.

Most of the panellists were in favour of combining a top-down/bottom-up approach, meaning that participants could select (bottom-up) from among a list of pre-defined topics (top-down).

In terms of preparing citizens for discussion, once again two main approaches can be used:

- Participants are prepared to discuss the topics, for instance with facilitators, and receive an information package on the topics (e.g. transnational citizens' dialogues of the EC);
- Participants start from a blank sheet, without any pre-selected topics – as is the case in Paris, Madrid and in the German-speaking community of Belgium.

In any case, the more concrete the topic is, the more interested participants will be. It will also be easier to provide concrete feedback afterwards.

- **How should the results of consultations feed into the decision-making process?**

Practitioners highlighted several lessons learnt:

- Ensuring political support: it is important to ensure the political support and buy-in of the process from the beginning, so that decisions taken can feed into decision-making, notably at local level with local and regional authorities (e.g. Ireland, Baden-Württemberg);
- Including the results in policy-making: it is essential to deliver and implement what has been decided in citizens' assemblies (e.g. in Gdansk a deliberation approved by more than 80% of the votes must be implemented by the mayor);
- Keeping participants informed: it is important to keep track of what has been discussed, e.g. by creating reports to provide evidence of the outputs of the consultations and the possible impact(s) of the decisions taken in the decision-making process;
- Guaranteeing a clear process: the different steps of the process should be clearly explained from the beginning, and the participants should be aware of the extent to which their contribution will influence the legislative process. In addition, transparency is essential: participants (and citizens more generally) should be able to visualise the decision-making process. A proper follow-up and summarisation of the results is needed;
- Managing expectations: the limits of the process should also be made clear. Organisers should not make too many promises to participants or raise expectations too high that all their contributions will be taken into account or will impact the legislation;
- Communicating with participants from the start: organisers should clearly explain from the beginning how results will be managed and by whom, how they are expected to feed into the decision-making process and what follow-up will be given to the assemblies.

D. Next steps

Following this series of lunchtime seminars, the CoR will concentrate on two main streams:

- (i) Publishing a **repository of good practices and concrete cases** of citizen engagement at local/regional/national and pan-European level. We plan to publish this book on the occasion of the SOTREG speech of President Lambertz in October 2019 (exact timing TBC); and
- (ii) Drafting the **cahier des charges (handbook) of the new model of European Citizens' Consultations**, as a basis for a call for applications and kick-off of the process in May 2020. We plan to launch the call on the occasion of the EURegionsWeek.

E. Annexes

1. List of speakers and moderators

4 April, 12:00-13:30, room JDE 70 ([agenda](#) / [video](#))

Marcin Gerwin, PhD, specialist in deliberative democracy, Poland – citizens' assemblies for sustainable cities and regions and the example of the City of Gdansk;

Urmo Kübar, civil society adviser to the President of Estonia – how to create a stimulating environment to encourage public participation;

Vanessa Cotterell, policy manager, European Movement International (EMI), Belgium – citizen consultations as an effective tool to enhance democratic participation in Europe;

Christian Matheis, Representative of the State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg, Germany – the region's new "Strategy for Europe" developed with citizens in 2017/18.

Moderator:

Andrea Bodova, Acting Head of Unit, Unit Events, European Committee of the Regions

9 April, 12:00-13:30, room JDE 70 ([agenda](#) / [video](#))

Noelle O' Connell, Executive Director, European Movement Ireland – Ireland's Citizens' Dialogues on the Future of Europe;

Wietse Van Ransbeeck, CEO Citizen Lab, Belgium – e-tools for more collaborative decision-making.

Moderator:

Martin Gosset, campaign manager, Unit Events, European Committee of the Regions

11 April, 12:00-13:30, room JDE 60 ([agenda](#) / [video](#))

Costanza Gaeta, Director for Institutional, European and International Affairs at the Italian Conference of Regional Parliaments – stakeholders' involvement in legislative proposals;

Tremeur Denigot, Communications Director, #WeEuropeans Project Manager – CIVICO project;

Alessandro Giordani, Head of Unit "Networks in the Member States", Directorate-General for Communication, European Commission – series of cross-border citizens' dialogues;

Alexander Miesen, President of the Parliament of the German-Speaking Community of Belgium – permanent citizens' assembly ("Bürgerversammlung").

Moderator:

Pierluigi Brombo, Head of Unit, Relations with Organised Civil Society and Forward Studies, EESC

24 April, 12:00-13:30, room JDE 70 ([agenda](#) / [video](#))

Ari Brodach, responsible for participatory budgeting and citizen engagement, City of Paris, France – "Paris Budget Participatif";

Cato Léonard, Campaign Leader G1000, Managing Partner, Glassroots, Belgium – deliberative democracy, G1000 and other Belgian examples;

Borja Prieto Ursúa, Head of Promotion and Institutional Extension, DG of Citizen Participation, Madrid City Council, Spain – project "Decide Madrid";

Nicola Vathauer, Communications Director at EUROCITIES, Belgium – "Smart talking – lessons from our citizens' panels."

Angelika Poth-Mögele, Executive Director European Affairs at the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) – local and regional dialogues on cohesion policy.

Moderator:

Nora Allavoine, Citizens' Dialogues Unit, DG COMM, European Commission

7 May, 12:00-13:30, room JDE 70 ([agenda](#) / [video](#))

Claudia Chwalisz, Policy Analyst, Open Government Unit, OECD;

Corina Stratulat, Senior Policy Analyst, Head of Programme, EPC;

Dominik Hierlemann, Bertelsmann Foundation, Gütersloh/Brussels, Belgium.

Moderator:

Federico Rossetto, Head of Unit, Strategic Support Unit for Liaison Offices, EP