



European Committee
of the Regions

| BertelsmannStiftung

European democracy, citizens' participation and the role of regions and cities

Working conference, 27 June 2022, 14:00-20:00,
European Committee of the Regions, rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 101

Thematic briefing for workshop 3 How to do capacity-building and networking on citizens' participation?

Questions the workshop should address

- 1) *What quality standards, competences, skills are needed for citizens' participation to be successful?*
- 2) *How to embed efforts of capacity-building (training, guidelines etc.) inside administration and beyond?*
- 3) *What should be the role for an EU network on citizens' participation and how to organise it well?*

Background

Among the European Commission's priorities, a "[new push for European democracy](#)" aims at giving European citizens a bigger say and strengthening democratic participation and active citizenship. It fueled deliberative and participatory approaches in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe and the roll-out of the [European Democracy Action Plan](#). Lessons learned from participatory citizens' involvement suggest, however, that such processes require significant resources and need to be accompanied by capacity-building, exchange between local actors and evaluation and research. The follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe should provide fertile ground for deepening existing models and tools, not at least with a view to the 2024 European Elections.

In Europe's cities and regions, one finds a wealth of participatory processes to engage citizens, which vary with regards to the policy issues or controversies surrounding them, the methods applied as well as their level of "constitutionalisation". Similarly, EU institutions have involved stakeholders and citizens in policy-making e.g., through the European Citizens' Initiative, public consultations and thousands of citizens' dialogues held since 2012. Moreover, the European Commission carries out regular public opinion surveys on the citizens' perception of the EU and its policies. The Conference on the Future of Europe marks a move from communicating and listening to enabling co-creation and deliberative models to make citizens' engagement a truly open and proactive process.

The [2021 Report of the European Parliament on citizens dialogues and participation in EU decision-making](#) supports the view that "it is important to promote exchanges between citizens

of different countries at European, national, regional and local level, in particular through networks of towns and regions, and by facilitating an inter-regional dialogue”. In an opinion adopted in 2020, the European Committee of the Regions proposed to establish an EU-wide network on citizen engagement (“CitizEN”), which would facilitate exchange and cooperation on local, regional, national and European approaches enhancing involvement of citizens in policy-making.

Citizens’ participation in the EU: networks, exchange and research

[EU-funded research on democracy and governance](#) has touched upon different aspects of citizens’ participation, Launched in October 2021, the European Commission’s [“Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy”](#) at the Joint Research Centre provides a knowledge base, a community of practice, training and conferences. In May 2021 the European Commission published call for proposals under the “Horizon Europe” programme to set up a [“network for innovative solutions for the future of democracy”](#), which could be launched in autumn 2022. The network will aim at bringing together practitioners and researchers in the field of democracy, civic deliberation, participation and citizenship education.

In its [Communication on the follow-up on the Conference on the Future of Europe of 17 June 2022](#), the European Commission suggests that regions and cities shall be systematically put on the map of the EU when it comes to democratic innovation. The Communication refers to a “European public space” to flourish and “democracy to be enriched at European, national, regional and local level” through “Citizens Panels to deliberate and make recommendations ahead of certain key proposals”. The Communication also suggests to continue “innovative research on democracy and governance”, projects looking into “effective methods for multi-level, multilingual, and multi-modal citizen deliberations at the EU level” as well as pilot models for targeted deliberations and co-creation processes for specific EU policies.

A [recent study by the Bertelsmann Stiftung](#) analyses the existing channels of citizens’ participation the EU and combined them with evidence from surveys and research. The study concludes that in order to make citizens’ participation work, the EU needs to move from a participation patchwork to a participation infrastructure by addressing three gaps: the awareness gap, the performance gap, and the political commitment gap. In a participation infrastructure, the individual instruments would not only work on their own, but would collectively establish the basis for a functioning participatory EU democracy alongside the representative dimension of European policy-making.

Further reading

Conference on the Future of Europe Observatory (2022), Conference on the Future of Europe: what worked, what now, what next? High-Level Advisory Group report (22 February 2022): Brussels, [online](#)

Dijkstra, Lewis, Hugo Poelman and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose (2018), The geography of EU discontent, European Commission, DG REGIO Working papers 12/2018, Brussels, [online](#)

European Commission (2022), Horizon Europe/research on democracy and governance, [website](#)

European Parliament (2021), Citizens dialogues and citizens’ participation in EU decision-making, *Official Journal of the EU*, C 200, 7 July 2021, pp 49-53; report by Helmut Scholz, 21 June 2021, [online](#)

European Committee of the Regions (2020), Local and regional authorities in the permanent dialogue with citizens”, *Official Journal of the EU*, C 440, 18 December 2020, pp 49-53; report by Declan McDonnell, [online](#)

Hierlemann, Dominik, Stefan Roch, Paul Butcher, Janis A. Emmanouilidis, Corina Stratulat, Maarten De Groot (2022), Under construction – citizen participation in the European Union, Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung: Gütersloh, [online](#)

OECD (2020), Innovative citizen participation and new democratic institutions. Catching the deliberative wave, Paris, [online](#)