Chapter 9

Formal Agenda-Setting (European Level)

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Abstract Rose et al. introduce four digital democratic tools which serve or have served to support formal agenda-setting on the European level (European Citizens' Initiative, Futurium, Your Voice in Europe, and European Citizens' Consultations). The authors place a strong focus on the participatory process and practical experiences. For a better understanding of these tools and how they are used in practice, interviews were conducted with administrators and researchers familiar with the respective tools. Strengths and weaknesses are identified and possibilities for improvements explored. While each tool shows positive results in different ways, their impact in terms of policy tools leaves much to be desired. Lessons learnt include the need to communicate clearly what input is desired from the participants and transparency about what outcomes can be expected and how the collected input is utilized. The tools must also be flexible enough to adapt to user feedback in order to provide for a learning process to take place.

9.1 European Citizens' Initiative

9.1.1 Introduction

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is the first supranational instrument of participatory democracy in the European Union. The purpose of the ECI is to allow citizens to participate directly in the law-making process of the EU, giving citizens—under certain conditions—the opportunity of inviting the European Commission to legislate on a matter through the submission of a proposal. Currently this is the only tool granting EU citizens such a right (Lironi 2016: 34).

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The key condition is that a million participants of at least seven Member States support an initiative by means of their signature within 12 months after its registration. Signatures can be collected offline as well as online through digital collection systems certified by national authorities in Member States. In order to sign a citizens' initiative, one must be an EU citizen and of voting age concerning European Parliament elections. Support forms are verified by the respective competent national authorities (EC 2016b). Initiatives which have reached the signature goal are then examined by the European Commission within a timespan of 3 months and a decision is made on whether or not the initiative warrants legislative steps to be taken. During the examination phase organizers are granted the opportunity to appear at a public hearing in the European Parliament to present their initiative. While there is no legal obligation for the EC to propose legislation, they must justify their decisions within a communication. This communication must detail how the Commission will proceed and what actions will be proposed (if any), and explanations for the decisions are given. It is made available in all official EU languages and adopted by the College of Commissioners (EC 2016c). The Europe Direct Contact Centre offers information and assistance concerning ECI rules and procedures in all EU languages, with over 1080 questions having been processed according to the 2015 Report from the Commission (EC 2015a).

Between the launch of the ECI and our analysis conducted in January of 2017, there have been 59 submissions to the EC. Only three of these were successful in terms of reaching the signature goals and proceeding to the next phase of the process, namely: "Right2Water", "One of us" and "Stop vivisection". Concerning the use of online channels, the "Right2Water" initiative collected up to 80% of its statements of support online, the "One of us" initiative merely around 30%, and "Stop vivisection" around 60% (EC 2015a: 7). At the time of analysis, four of the initiatives were still open. A total of 20 initiatives were refused for registration, of which 18 gathered insufficient support, and 14 initiatives were withdrawn by the organizers. Since the conclusion of our study, a fourth initiative, "Ban glyphosate", has successfully reached the required number of statements of support.

9.1.2 Participants

In general, the structure of the ECI appears to favour existing civil society organizations above individual citizens (Organ 2014), despite the fact that organizations cannot run a citizens' initiative. Civil society organizations are, however, permitted to promote or offer support for initiatives if this is done in a transparent manner (EC 2016c). The most common promoters of initiatives are well-established organizations with the aim of promoting a very specific policy and European organizations promoting public participation in EU policymaking in general (such as the King Baudouin Foundation or environmental groups such as Greenpeace). The third most prominent type consists of companies and organizations representing business interests with a specific focus on the health sector (see also Greenwood 2012: 333).

A fourth group consists of EU officials and representatives that use the ECI in order to raise attention to issues already being discussed in the EU.

Concerning the signatories of initiatives, no data are collected by the Commission concerning demographic information such as level of education regarding specific ECIs. The collection of statements of support is carried out by organizers of initiatives. The ECI Regulation provides *inter alia* for the specific rules on the procedures and conditions for the collection of statements of support, including the information to be provided by signatories for the different Member States, and the protection of personal data (ECI Regulation 2011, Articles 5 and 12). While consequently no specific observations can be made by the Commission regarding the representativeness or share of professionals supporting specific initiatives, it is commonly believed that ECI participants tend to be well educated with a high interest in EU matters. General information on the ECI instrument, also regarding awareness, participation and socio-demographic data, has been collected for the ECI as a whole via Eurobarometer Surveys (c.f. Flash Eurobarometer 430). Overall over 6 million people have participated in the ECI to date (interview with Commission official; see also EC 2015b). Despite there being no data on representativeness, the fact that the ECI is an offline and online tool makes it reasonable to assume it is more widespread and can reach out to certain groups which would not be reached exclusively through online means. *“The offline campaign for the ECI is very strong, especially on the national level. I know of organizers who were really going to different events, trying to reach out to different groups physically and not only virtually. [...] If the organizers want to reach out to minority groups, there is a possibility to do so with a tool like the ECI”* (interview with researcher).

Responsibility for raising awareness, collection of statements of support and mobilization of support for specific initiatives primarily lies with the initiator of an ECI. The Commission carries out information and awareness-raising actions on the ECI instrument. Information on the specific initiatives is provided via the ECI official website. State of play on ongoing initiatives is also provided as part of the Commission awareness-raising and communication actions. When asked about current efforts to improve this situation and raise awareness of the ECI, the Commission mentioned *inter alia* the ECI official register and website dedicated to this purpose which provides comprehensive and updated information on the ECI available in all EU languages ([website](#) accessed 18.01.2019). The Commission also provides the Guide on the ECI available in all EU languages and provided free of charge by the Commission both online and in paper version ([website](#) accessed 18.01.2019). The Commission is also working on several actions for awareness-raising on the ECI instrument, and also cooperates for instance with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the Member States authorities in the ECI Expert Group and the EC Representations in the Member States in communication actions. In order to increase representativeness civil society events such as the ECI Day are being organized by the EESC. The Commission participates in this event and cooperates with the EESC in several ECI-related actions. There are also increased cooperation and synergies with the “Europe for Citizens” Programme (interview with Commission official).

According to the Report of the Commission from 2015, the ECI register has offered over 300 translations in total, with the average initiative being available in 11 languages and four initiatives offering translations in all official EU languages at the point of the Report being written (EC 2015a). Since April 2015, the EESC provides direct assistance to ECI organizers via translation services, which include the translation of the 800-character ECI submission text in all EU languages for all registered ECIs. Organizers can submit the request to the EESC to translate the main elements of their ECI (i.e., title; subject matter; main objectives; and relevant EU Treaties provisions) and then can submit these translations to the Commission for its validation and publication in the ECI official register. These translation services are therefore available to all organizers of ECIs since April 2015 (interview with Commission official).

9.1.3 Participatory Process

In order to submit an initiative, EU citizens must form a “citizens’ committee” which can then launch an initiative by registering on the ECI website. A citizens’ committee must be made up of at least seven EU citizens of seven different Member States and the members must be of voting age in European Parliament elections according to their respective national law. The conditions for registering are as follows: the initiative must fall within a field of EU competence (e.g. environment, agriculture, transport, public health) and there must be a Treaty provision to serve as a legal basis. Once an initiative has been registered it requires a total of 1 million supporting signatures; additionally, a minimum number of signatures is required for each Member State, which must be reached for at least seven Member States (EC 2015a; Lironi 2016: 34).

An important possible restriction for participants is the fact that there is no available EU funding for citizens willing to start an ECI. In addition, ECI initiators often have to engage with legally qualified personnel, data protection specialists, fundraisers and marketing specialists (Greenwood 2012: 332). For transparency reasons organizers have to provide information on all financial sources exceeding 500 € per year and per sponsor (EC 2015a).

9.1.4 Results

An estimated 6 million people have participated in the ECI according to the Commission report on the application of the ECI Regulation of March 2015. The start of citizens’ initiatives has contributed to participation at the EU level and the launch of pan-European debates. There is, however, clear room for improvement regarding the amount of initiatives which are successful in terms of reaching the one million signature goal (interview with Commission official). One of the main

challenges of the ECI therefore lies in supporting ECI initiators in collecting signatures within the given timeframe. While the success rate of the ECI is not very high when measured in these terms, it can be argued that initiatives which fall short with regard to signatures can still have an impact, seeing as they can stimulate a debate on their respective subject matter (interview with Commission official). This sentiment was also shared by the interviewed researcher: *“I do think that it is not true that the ECIs, even the ones that did not reach a million signatures, did not have impact. [...] I know, for example, the [initiative] on water, even though the Commission didn’t start any sort of logistical proposal on it, in some national countries such as Italy, the fact that the ECI existed and the fact that there was a debate going around it and the fact that people were campaigning for the ECI also made national politicians realize there was a problem. And they actually debated it in national government.”*

It could be observed that ECIs are expensive on part of the organizers, which consequently means that “ordinary citizens” are at a disadvantage. Over 100,000 € have been spent on initiatives passing the million signature mark (Malosse 2015) with the initiative “Water is a human right” having raised 140,000 € in support and funding, “Stop vivisection” having raised 23,651 € and “One of us” having raised 159,219 €. Sangsari (2013) points out the need for organizers to possess human and financial resources, networks, alliances, coalitions with civil society, media and NGOs in order to gather the promotion and awareness needed for success.

One of the most fundamental shortcomings of the tool, as perceived by interviewee 17 (researcher), is that the ECI is not cost-effective. Large investments are required, also in terms of organization, for relatively low rewards in terms of certainty of impact. *“It just requires too much effort to implement, design and everything, and it just gives the people very little impact [...] and a lot of frustration because they don’t see where the results are going.”* While the information supplied by the ECI website itself is generally very good, the feedback of results to the participants is lacking, which can in turn contribute to a lack of visibility of impact and contribute to the frustrations of citizens. Currently the results of the ECI are not legally binding, *“[h]owever, most respondents clarified that ‘binding results’ do not necessarily mean a direct change in EU legislation because of a successful ECI, as it would both be undemocratic and lead to ‘dangerous waters’. What they mean is that there should be more efforts by the European Commission to reach a binding follow-up, for example an inter-institutional debate on the ECI results”* (Lironi 2016: 47–48). As could be witnessed with the first three ECIs to reach the required support, the Commission has committed to a set of follow-up actions in response to two of these successful initiatives (these can be found on the ECI [website](#), accessed 18.01.2019). Even if no legal outcomes are achieved, it can be argued that the legitimacy of the policy agenda can be increased through deliberation (see also Organ 2014).

It can be observed that the ECI suffers from a lack of presence. Many citizens have never heard of the tool, due to there not being much media coverage, with the level of awareness likely differing between Member States. Single initiatives and campaigns can become well known, while the underlying tool of the ECI remains

unfamiliar to most citizens. The EESC carries out awareness-raising events such as the “ECI Day”. Already in 2012, the Commission established a point of contact providing information and assistance, based in the Europe Direct Contact Centre. Through this point of contact it answers any questions from citizens on the ECI rules and procedures, in all official EU languages. As referred to in the report on the application of the ECI Regulation (March 2015), during the first 3 years of the ECI operation, the point of contact has answered over 1080 questions. The ECI Support Centre (a not-for-profit service and initiative of the European Citizen Action Service, Democracy International and the Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe) has also worked on the development of an Android smartphone ECI-App meant to keep people updated and raise awareness. The App allows users to sign initiatives via their mobile phones (ECI Support Centre 2016). These efforts also address another point of common criticism pertaining to a lack of user-friendliness. In order to sign an ECI, a number of personal data is required from citizens. This entails a strong discouraging effect, particularly in connection with the low expectations with regard to impact and security concerns. Thomson (2014: 74) states that every single campaign “*has suffered, often gravely, from a myriad of problems stemming from these data requirements*”, referring to the large amount of personal data, for example ID card numbers, signatories have to submit when stating their support for an initiative. While the amount of information gathered from citizens is deemed “*excessive*”, email addresses are not collected, making it difficult to provide feedback about the initiative. The issue of user-friendliness remains problematic, as the issue needs to be balanced with questions of privacy and security. New updates of the OCS are released regularly, with an adapted version for mobile devices and improved functionalities being expected already in 2017. In addition, the collection of data, which is considered to be a big stumbling block for would-be signatories, is decided by each individual Member State (interview with Commission official). Due to a lack of harmonization between different countries regarding identification requirements and signature collections, expatriates are often excluded from the online signature collection process. The Commission is working with the Member States on this issue and has launched a study in 2016 to assess the options for the simplifications of data requirements in the ECI context (interview with Commission official).

Another difficulty lies in the online collection system for signatures. The various technical and security requirements make this a challenge, though the Commission provides and updates an open source Online Collection Software (OCS) which organizers can use. The ECI Campaign offers an alternative software named OpenECI for signature collection (The ECI Campaign 2016).

After the conclusion of our study, the European Commission presented a legislative proposal to revise the European Citizens’ Initiative on 13 September 2017 (EC 2017). A draft report of this proposal was published by the Parliament’s Committee on Constitutional Affairs (EFCO) on 9 March 2018 (EP 2018). These proposed changes are not considered in our analysis of the ECI case study. If adopted, however, the proposed ECI revisions could entail several changes which could potentially impact the case assessment. A select number of proposed changes are as follows:

- The minimum age to support an initiative is to be lowered to 16 (art 2).
- The Commission shall establish an online collaborative platform with a dedicated discussion forum (art 4).
- The Commission shall provide the translation of content into all official languages of the Union for its publication in the register and its use for the collection of statements of support (art 4).
- Organizers can form a legal entity in accordance with national law (art 5).
- Clarification of the conditions of liability of the group of organizers (art 5).
- Partial registration of an initiative in cases where only part or parts of the initiative meet the requirements for registration (art 6).
- Organizers shall have the possibility to resubmit a revised initiative (art 6).
- The 12 months for collection of statements of support shall start with the beginning of the collection period determined by the group of organizers (art 8).
- Statements of support shall be simplified by providing only personal data set out in one of the Annexes (art 9).
- There shall be a central online collection system operated by the Commission for the collection of statements of support (art 10).
- Institutions and advisory bodies of the Union and interested stakeholders should have the opportunity to participate in the hearings of successful initiatives (art 14).
- Groups of organizers or the Commission should have the ability to collect email addresses for communication purposes (art 17).
- There shall be a periodical review of the functioning of the ECI at least every 5 years (art 24).

The changes are to apply from 1 January 2020. These changes would primarily impact the liability of initiative organizers, the provision of information and advice, the registration phase of initiatives, the minimum age to support initiatives, the signature collection phase and the review provisions. The Council of the European Union announced that it is ready to enter into interinstitutional negotiations on the legislative revision of the ECI on 26 June 2018. The Council supports the Commission's proposal in large parts but rejects the suggestion of lowering of the minimum age to 16 and suggests banning the use of individual online collection systems (Council of the European Union 2018).

Overall, after 5 years of existence, the ECI as an institutional innovation has certainly achieved some success in mobilizing citizens across Europe and thus in contributing to the formation of a European public sphere to some extent; however, it has achieved modest success at best as regards enhancing the citizens' influence on EU level decision-making to date. It would definitely be too pessimistic to conclude that the instrument has a predominantly symbolic function. The fact that the ECI offers citizens an opportunity to set the agenda at the EU level must be recognized as an important benefit. The EU institutions can profit from this citizen input, by gaining more insight into public opinion (Lironi 2016: 47). The promising signs of progress the instrument has shown within the most recent developments underline the democratic potential which it can further unfold in future. It is to some extent still

an experiment with many open questions and it was therefore wise to include a clause for a possible revision every 3 years after a period of gathering experience with the new instrument. For now, it seems that the ECI's relevance is far greater in contributing to issue-specific discourse and citizen mobilization at the EU level than in terms of concrete policy-shaping impact.

9.2 Futurium

9.2.1 Introduction

Futurium is an e-participation tool developed by Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT) of the European Commission. They created it as part of “Digital Futures”, a project that ran from autumn 2011 until December 2013. The first version of this participatory foresight tool stimulated citizens, businesses, public administrations, NGOs and professionals to reflect on possible futures together (not on existing policies) and aimed to generate ICT policy visions that could inspire strategic choices at the European level. At the same time, it was an attempt to respond to the growing demand for citizen participation in policymaking by implementing a so-called “Policy Making 3.0” model (EC 2016a) based on the metaphor of emerging collective intelligence. “*In opening Futurium to broad public participation, Digital Futures created an experiment in crowdsourcing policy foresight*” (EC 2016a: 20). Futurium is meant to substantiate the legal obligation for the European Union to consult society in general as mentioned in article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty.

In the first experimental phase Futurium used social networks, participatory engagement and an online foresight toolkit to facilitate policy co-creation. The model was based on four main ingredients:

- Futures: Visions of what the world might look like, and the associated challenges and opportunities.
- Policy ideas: Ideas for possible future policies co-created to realize a chosen future or vision.
- Evidence: Data used to provide scientific ground to visions and policy ideas (links, data, etc.).
- Events: Bringing people offline together to discuss particular futures or policy ideas.

The tool was supposed to combine “*the informal character of social networks, the simplicity of wikis and the methodological approach of foresights*” (EC 2016a: 5). At the moment, Futurium is serving a number of units at the Commission as a platform where new policymaking experiences can be conducted through both scientific evidence and stakeholders’ participation (Lironi 2016: 39–40). The tool can be used to discuss ongoing trends or to simply gather input on possible future policies. In its transition to a regular EU participation tool, Futurium became less

sophisticated as an interviewee (developer) notes: *“The new platforms are based on a much simpler engagement model than the very structured foresight approach of Digital Futures.”* Other features of Futurium as mentioned in the final report of Digital Futures, such as *“knowledge harvesting tools for policy-makers and stakeholders, data-crawling tools to extract knowledge from social networks and data-gathering tools to fetch real world data”* (EC 2016a: 39) are not incorporated in the platform at the moment. Latter tools have been made available for the different DGs of the EC as a separate data analytics module called Doris (interview with developer). But as the interviewed developer states: *“Realising the Policy Making 3.0 vision of combining the opinions of the crowd with evidence coming from big data may require long term investments, which goes beyond the scope of Futurium.”*

On the Futurium platform there are currently 15 areas (“engagement activities”) where participants can share their ideas, ranging from contributions to the Urban Agenda or how to improve eGovernment services in the EU, sign a petition or cast a vote for the Innovation Radar Prize (November 12th 2018). Every engagement activity has its own topic, landing page, platform and selected tools. Many of these engagement activities also include offline meetings, feeding into the online discussions and vice versa. In this case description we will focus on two specific projects that used (Digital Futures) or are using (eGovernment4EU) Futurium as a tool in their stakeholder engagement activities.

Futurium is an open source project based on Open Source Drupal developed specifically for the European Commission. The tool is secured and there are corporate EC measures taken to protect the tool from misuse of data and hacking. The different platforms are only mildly moderated. The development of the initial tool itself costed around 100,000 € (interview with developer). The budget for maintenance, hosting and curation is not included in this amount.

9.2.2 Participants

Futurium has been host and still is host to (currently 15) different projects. At the moment more than 6000 people have registered at Futurium, which means they have been or are contributing to one or more of the projects currently running. The current projects—contrary to Digital Futures according to the interviewed developer—attract more than the usual stakeholders, for example, the experts on the subject who are otherwise also consulted by the European Commission.

Digital Futures was one of the first experiments by the European Commission in adopting a bottom-up, participatory process in a foresight project. From the final report (EC 2016a: 116), it seems the participants included mostly scientists, innovators, students and policymakers. The interviewed developer was quite content with the diversity of the participants: *“Digital Futures was able to capture everyone, students, the people in schools, teachers, also thanks to the accompanying in-person events. We were able to get on board people who had never heard of DG Connect.”*

Following the initial experience with Digital Futures, other policy areas have also been using Futurium as a tool for crowdsourcing ideas for future policies. One of them is eGovernment4EU which aims to accelerate the digital transformation of government. The platform enables stakeholders to publicly exchange their views in an open, transparent way by proposing concrete actions for implementation. The target group includes citizens, stakeholder organizations and associations, IT companies working with and/or for public administrations. In 2016 about 230 people have subscribed to the platform and about 50 people have contributed (interview with Community manager; it is not clear from the website if these numbers have increased recently). One-third of them are professionals from public administrations; another third from associations, businesses or organizations working in the field. The other third are citizens (interview with community manager). The online activities are being complemented by in-person meetings. The participants of the current platforms like eGovernment4EU are self-selected and invited to participate.

The engagement strategy of Digital Futures was one of the success factors according to the final report. Every participant could invite friends and colleagues to be engaged in Digital Futures and every participant could host a Digital Future conversation on the platform. That way the initiators wanted to create a viral process. All the online and offline meetings of Digital Futures together involved over 3500 participants in more than 100 participatory brainstorming events (on invitation) throughout the project, including more than 30 webinars. The community built around the project consisted of more than 2000 members who actually subscribed to the tool. Online participants could sign up themselves for the webinars or give their input on the website (self-selection). The interviewed developer was less enthusiastic about the communication strategy: *“We were not experts in engagement. That was linked to the exploratory nature of the foresight project. It was via social media and in-person meetings and events that people came to know about it [...] I need to say that getting viral is a very hard goal, especially on policy topics and foresight. We learnt all of this with Digital Futures.”*

The possibilities to participate on eGovernment4EU have been communicated through on-site workshops about the eGovernment Action Plan, news items at websites, different newsletters, social media (mainly Twitter), presentations and distribution of flyers and post cards at different events on e-government. They also tried to get certain NGOs interested and to have other institutions link to the platform. One of the challenges the community manager is taking up is trying to have national administrations, or even regional administrators, link from their website to the platform of eGovernment4EU (interview with community manager). However, the engagement has not been very high. One explanation might be that all the information on the platform is in English. The interviewed community manager also mentions that a lot of eGovernment initiatives take place at national, regional and/or local levels, so participants wonder why to put their ideas or best practices forward at the European level.

9.2.3 Participatory Process

Digital Futures had and eGovernment4EU still has both online and offline activities organized that enrich the consultation process. The community manager sums up the relevancy of the online part of the consultation: *“I think that one of the things an online platform offers is first of all the transparency of the process. That when you do it offline, people don’t know exactly what has been done, they don’t know who has participated and worked on the proposals.”* The online participatory processes of Digital Futures and eGovernment4EU are explained below.

9.2.3.1 Digital Futures

There are five different ways in which participants could contribute to Digital Futures: co-creating visions and policy ideas, organizing events, attaching evidence and linking it to visions and policies, grouping people and content into communities and commenting on content posted by others (interview with developer). The input of participants was aggregated in different ways, for example by voting or according to keywords. In the exchange of arguments between participants the deliberative performance of the platform was optimal, but less between participants and decision-makers (interview with developer). The content on the website was more aimed at experts and moderately comprehensible.

After the consultation Digital Futures was finished, DG CONNECT organized three public workshops in 2015–2016 to collect best practices, ideas and feedback on how to engage with stakeholders online and how to shape the eGovernment Action Plan 2016–2020, especially through Futurium. In the report of this workshop (EC 2015c) some improvements are mentioned: add a status overview of the process and account for the follow-up of proposals, more social media options, better structured discussions, more feedback, identification of most active users, more gamification and differentiated voting. Some of the comments lead to changes in the design of the tool.

According to the interviewed developer the information on the decision-making process on Digital Futures was very clear: *“Because we said to the participants, you give us your vision, then you give us the policy ideas and any evidence, and then we will summarise and offer it as an input it in the context of the renewal of the commission.”* Also *“every participant got an email with the final report”*. In the end, however, Digital Futures focused on the visions and less on the policy ideas because DG CONNECT wanted to retain their independent role and not anticipate on the ideas and plans of the new Commission.

9.2.3.2 eGovernment4EU

Participants can contribute to the eGovernment4EU platform in six different ways: express their needs regarding eGovernment services or propose a solution, start discussions about these needs or solutions which could help modernize public administrations using ICT, add documents to the library, start a poll, list an event or write a blog. Once an idea has been submitted other participants can also contribute to its definition or justification with their own input. The features “needs” and “library” are used the most, but participants are hesitant to list an event or write a blog (interview with community manager). The last entry in “needs/ideas” is from end of July 2018. There is not much activity going on. Discussion between participants is facilitated, but this functionality also has not been used for a long time. The last entry is from September 2017. In order to stimulate an evidence-based discussion Futurium allows participants to upload documents, statistics or data from any source to substantiate their proposal, solution or the discussion. Here the last entry is of January 2018, also quite a while ago. The platform also provides a number of datasets and tools for visualization. However, according to the community manager it might not be clear to all users why this option is there and how it works: *“The bigger purpose and functions are not very well explained, I think.”*

The entire decision-making process of eGovernment4EU is presented in a flow-chart and help in the preparation and assessment of a proposal is offered by putting up selection criteria. Every 6 months the steering board, consisting of representatives of the Commission and the Member States, should evaluate the proposed actions and decide which ones they will commit to in the Action Plan. Therefore, the core of the eGovernment4EU platform consists of an actions dashboard that lists the status of current actions. *“We [...] inform about the owners, their status of implementation, the due date, etc. It creates transparency on the state of play of each of the actions”* (interview with community manager). The latest update is however from May 2017. It seems that—although on the website it is stated that feedback on the proposals and what has been done with them is communicated through the platform—not much feedback is given lately. It is only in two blogposts (see Results) that some reference is made to “themes” based on ideas expressed on the platform that are taken up by the Steering Board.

9.2.4 Results

The Digital Futures campaign “A journey into the 2050s visions and policy challenges” lasted about 1 year, and produced within Futurium produced over 200 “futures”, 35 interviews with high-standing experts and futurologists, and more than 1800 evidence library entries. The stakeholder engagement strategy also

included social media presence on the major networks (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn).

The interviewed developer was very enthusiastic about the impact of Digital Futures: *“Many people were inspired by the participatory approach to open up foresight to potentially everyone. [...] Also, some of the challenges or opportunities identified by Digital Futures are nowadays becoming hot topics. For instance the prospect of a super centenarian society or that robots will take over jobs from humans.”* The evaluation report mentions valuable impacts (EC 2016a: 10–11). The 11 final themes provided interesting futures to inspire policy exploration and design. DG CONNECT services used these for example as input to prepare briefs for the 2015–2019 EU College of Commissioners. Digital Futures also contributed to major foresight exercises carried out at the EU level, such as the interinstitutional project European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS) and the Horizon 2020s strategic programming exercise 2016–2018. In the third place, the project has *“helped building skills and capacities which has been re-used to support other initiatives within DG CONNECT and the Commission”*. And in the last place: *“The Futurium platform has been adopted as a corporate platform as part of the EC-wide offering as well as by other institutions such as the Economic and Social Committee. Furthermore, the platform has generated the interest of several academic and industrial actors working on foresight and stakeholder engagement methodology”* (EC 2016a: 10).

According to the developer, one of the strengths of the tool is the possibility to structure conversation without making it complicated or tied to rigid structures and rules like in surveys. The tool has a possibility to summarize content using the most advanced data-related algorithm, the earlier mentioned Doris system. Other strengths, according to the interviewed developer, are (1) the possibility to download for free and use the tool by any public administration in Europe via the ISA JoinUp repository, (2) the possibility to integrate evidence stemming from real world (big) data into the policymaking process, and (3) the customizable participatory process that can be used to engage everyone in the policymaking process at any level.

However, the interviewed community manager thinks Futurium can be improved: *“I think it is not very attractive and also not very user-friendly in the sense that, some things are available, but they’re not explained very well. [...] And I think that this is an issue not only for the Futurium platform but more at the general level for the European Commission website. And anyway, it’s based on the European Commission look and feel. We cannot escape from that completely.”* The interviewed developer thinks the usability and functionality tool can be *“dramatically improved, but this may require governance decisions and time. Currently the tool implements only about 40% of the policy making 3.0 model”*. But he also admits that the original idea behind the tool—a policymaking model combining evidence and participation—might be too ambitious and future-oriented.

In February 2017 the first ideas from the platform eGovernment4EU were presented at a meeting of the Steering Board. The board consisting of representatives of the EU Member States and EFTA countries is responsible for assessing—and ultimately select—the proposals for newly identified actions in the eGovernment

Action Plan (and coordinating the effective implementation and monitoring of it). In May 2017 new actions were added to the Action Plan but it is not clear from the website whether these new actions are originally ideas from the eGovernment4EU platform. In a blog post it is only mentioned that *“During its first cycle [of the eGOV4EU platform], more than 30 ideas were expressed, and four themes were picked up for further developments.”* Again in February 2018 another set of ideas were presented to the Steering Board. In a blog post—including a PowerPoint presentation of the ideas—it was mentioned that *“Although many of the ideas need to be developed further to reach their full potential, the Steering Board agreed that they would like to look further into the following themes: implementation of the Once Only Principle, digital skills for civil servants, personal data management, public procurement for start-ups.”* It seems though that no new actions have been added to the Action Plan since then.

9.3 Your Voice in Europe

9.3.1 Introduction

Your Voice in Europe (YViE) is the European Commission’s “single access point” to a variety of consultations and feedback opportunities for citizens and various stakeholders which is now being integrated into the Better Regulation Portal “Contribute to law-making”. The Commission aims to take into account views of citizens and stakeholders throughout the policy cycle, ranging from the conception of a new idea to the adoption and evaluation of a proposal. The YViE portal is also part of the Commission’s minimum standards for consultation, meant to introduce better regulation and improve European governance (EC 2016d). Next to the open public consultations on Your Voice in Europe, the Better Regulation Agenda also provides citizens with the following opportunities to be part of the EU law-making process: they may provide feedback on roadmaps, inception impact assessments, legislative proposals and related impact assessments, express their views on how to make EU laws and initiatives more effective and efficient and share views on draft acts (EC 2016d, e).

Your Voice in Europe is a web portal initiated by the European Commission’s Directorate General for Informatics (DIGIT) and was launched in 2001. As of January 2017, there have been over 880 consultations. Participants are invited to share suggestions within a questionnaire or to formulate their contributions in an open format. Depending on the context, the questionnaire is typically designed with a mix of closed and open questions. Exchanges via email are not standard and are limited to rare cases with high technical difficulty and a low expected number of expert replies (interview with Commission official).

The consultations are initiated by the Directorates-Generals (DGs), who determine the topic and the desired publics. The “Better Regulation” guidelines outline which topics require an open public consultation. It is the responsibility of the DGs

to communicate the duration of the consultations, the minimum period being 12 weeks, and to provide feedback to the participants who were consulted (Badouard 2010: 104). In the past, the internal “unit culture” greatly affected how consultation inputs were assessed and the extent to which the consultations results were considered in a particular EU policy (Winkler 2007: 176). Since the adoption of the Better Regulation Agenda there is now clear guidance on how stakeholder input is to be processed. There is no censorship based on current policy lines; however, responses which go against the general values of the European Union will not be published. Responses which do not uphold EU values are rare, possibly due to the fact that opinions are not given anonymously (interview with Commission official).

The Your Voice in Europe tool is currently undergoing new developments with the aim of unifying the separate consultation pages. These are currently prepared and managed by the different Directorates using different templates (interview with Commission official). Furthermore, there are also plans to inform users about which targeted consultations are taking place. The interviewed Commission official described the new developments as “[...] a complete revamp of the way we interact with stakeholders. There will be and partly already is a complete new web-design and communication on consultations”. Next to the consultations there have been feedback opportunities on roadmaps and Commission adopted proposals since last year. *“These different feedback mechanisms and the consultations as we know them from Your Voice in Europe, they will all be integrated to one big portal that gives access to all the different types of consulting”* (interview with Commission official). The first phase has been launched in June of 2016, with the integration of Your Voice in Europe being planned for 2017. After the conclusion of our study, the described integration of “Your Voice in Europe” into the Better Regulation Portal has progressed and the webpage is no longer actively using the name “Your Voice in Europe”. It is instead titled “Consultations”. In addition to these changes, a new data analysis tool named “Doris”, developed by DG CONNECT, EC, is meant to assist in processing the textual input arriving in different languages. Doris has the ability to cluster words which are frequently used and group responses. While the program is not flawless, it assists the interpretation and analysis of the large amounts of incoming data (interview with Commission official).

While the guidelines of the general principles and minimum standards for stakeholder consultation of the European Commission state that input gathered through consultations should be analysed and contribute to policy preparation, *“neither the general principles nor the minimum standards are legally binding”* (Commission of the European Communities 2002: 9) and *“the DG at the origin of the consultation reserves itself the right to consider whether a contribution is relevant or not”* (Badouard 2010: 104, see also Badouard 2013: 156). Badouard concludes that the impact of Your Voice in Europe on the decision-making process is based on its institutionalization and the recognition as an e-government tool by the Commission. The guidelines also provide information on how to establish a consultation strategy, conduct the consultation work, inform policymaking and provide feedback among other things.

9.3.2 Participants

By definition the Your Voice in Europe tool only hosts open public consultations, with targeted consultations not being published on the page. Targeted consultations, workshops and conferences for very specific groups are being communicated outside of Your Voice in Europe. Despite only being for public consultations in principle, in practice hybrid questionnaires incorporating both elements can be employed: *“Sometimes it makes sense to separate the questionnaire into two parts. One part for the general public and then the second part being more technical, more detailed, usually only for expert stakeholders. So, there is a mix between a public consultation and a targeted consultation”* (interview with Commission official). Anyone is entitled to join public consultations as a respondent and may represent organizations and businesses.

A study dating back to 2009, undertaken by the French Economic Social and Environmental Council (ESEC), examined a total of 31 consultations which were held between September 2008 and March 2009. During these consultations 5553 replies were made, of which 18.5% were from public authorities, 46.5% from civil society organizations, 7.3% from research centres, universities and think tanks, 14.2% from individual citizens and 13.5% from businesses (Badouard 2010: 104, 2013: 159–160).

The home page of the website is available in all 24 official languages of the European Union, with around 25% of the consultation pages being available in all EU languages (interviewee, Commission official). Participants are therefore often required to possess English skills. In addition, many consultations are highly specialized, requiring the participants to have much knowledge and expertise on the subject (Badouard 2010: 104). One can observe that the more documents are translated into other languages, the more Eastern European participants will contribute and make use of the tool (interview with researcher). The amount of civil participation is expected to vary depending on the subject matter, with broad subjects or subjects relating to social issues inviting more civil participation than subjects of a technical nature (interview with researcher).

The consultations are not used as a tool to assess representative European views, as there is no way to ensure equal representation. Separate tools, such as the Eurobarometer by Eurostat, are used to fulfil this purpose (interview with Commission official). During our interview, the Commission official also mentioned that most big organizations can devote more resources to participating in a consultation, but it is much more difficult to gather individual responses from SMEs when dealing with policies which may affect small companies.

Typically, the possibilities to participate are communicated through interest representatives or civil society organizations, as well as on the Your Voice in Europe website (interview with researcher), and a notification system alerting subscribers of published consultations in the area of their interest (interview with Commission official). According to the interviewed researcher, particularly consultations on broad issues would benefit from media attention. For example, an association in

France placed an advertisement in a local journal asking for opinions for the “Public consultation on the European Citizens’ Initiative” held from 2009 to 2010. This association then collected the responses and passed them on to the Commission. *“I think this kind of procedure is quite interesting because I don’t think that the Commission has the power to target individual citizens that are far from the institution. [...] They can target some organization or association that [...] could be a relay to talk to people and to make them participate”* (interview with researcher).

Each Directorate is responsible for the communication strategy of their public consultation. *“Whenever the DG has to consult stakeholders, the DG is obliged to produce a consultation strategy, which so far didn’t focus too much on outreach and communication [...] but it will do so more in the future”* (interview with Commission official). In order to reach out to minority groups or people living in remote areas in Member States there is a need for targeted action. When attempting to invite groups such as local farmers to a consultation, one can use methods such as making an announcement in the local press. The consultation itself will still be Internet-bound, seeing as it is not logistically feasible to print out the questionnaires.

9.3.3 Participatory Process

The highly specialized consultations clearly favour expert responses (Badouard 2010), but attempts are being made to design the questionnaires in a manner which allows participants to first answer more basic questions before getting to more technical questions (interview with Commission official). The process of introducing more user-friendly ways of designing consultations is difficult, requiring a change in mindsets (interview with Commission official). Training sessions to this end are conducted on a voluntary basis. Questionnaires are scrutinized by a team of 10–12 people before being published on the consultation platform, with the aim of increasing the quality of the questionnaires. Following complaints of visually impaired people the issue of accessibility is also being looked into.

The tool does not provide a forum for deliberation, with there being no space for interaction among a larger number of participants. When asked whether a more deliberative function would be desirable, the interviewed Commission official responded: *“I believe that the intention is to have replies being published instantly, which would basically allow the second person to have a look at the first person’s replies and then make his or her comments accordingly or react to that. [...] There will be more of that, even though it is still very far from a discussion. But I’m not entirely sure whether the main aim of that tool should actually be about discussion. For that we have other ways of reaching out to stakeholders [...]”* In this context, feedback mechanisms, which allow stakeholders to instantly comment on roadmaps, inception impact assessments, delegated/implementing acts and legislative proposals early in the development, were mentioned.

9.3.4 Results

Your Voice in Europe is a participatory mechanism linked to the decision-making process; the goal is to gather views and evidence from stakeholders, including European citizens. It has the advantage of being institutionalized, meaning it is recognized by the Commission as an e-government tool for public policy (Badouard 2013). There is a duty to consult, but there is no legal obligation to use consultation contributions in any way. Although the general principles and minimum standards for stakeholder consultation do request consultations be analysed and contribute to policy preparation, they are not legally binding, resulting in the policy impact differing with political cultures within EU units as well as with policy intentions (Winkler 2007). A case study could, however, show considerable impact on a draft which was then sent to the Parliament and Council: *“Not only did the Commission consider propositions that did not support its views, it also changed its mind according to contributions, or developed half-way responses in order to take into account the advice expressed during the consultation”* (Badouard 2013: 158). Weaknesses of the previous propositions were exposed and relevant solutions proposed through the consultation. Seeing as the consultations mostly take place during the impact assessment phase before the final proposal is shaped, it is difficult to determine in retrospect how the final proposal would look like had the consultation not taken place (interview 24, Commission official).

Your Voice in Europe can boast several successes, such as the fact that various interest groups are represented in the online consultations. Access to EU-level consultation processes has also been increased for individual actors. All in all, participation through the web portal can be considered high and diverse with many different interests being represented (Quittkat and Finke 2008). According to Winkler (2007), EC experts reported a high quality of consultation contributions. *“[...] our analysis showed that most online consultations seem to be more than simple opinion polls. Yet, their quality as instruments of participatory policymaking varies with their format: especially consultations with open, albeit structured, questions offer real possibilities of participation, but participation rates are much higher when online consultations are based on (multiple-choice) questionnaires”* (Quittkat and Finke 2008: 218). A benefit of online consultation tools is also to be found within statistical evaluation opportunities at relatively low cost (Badouard 2010: 101; Winkler 2007).

Transparency, however, remains a big issue concerning the methodology chosen for consultation evaluation and a lack of feedback to the participants concerning their inputs (Researcher 26, see also Chalmers 2014, Quittkat 2011, Winkler 2007). All responses of the Commission are published on the website. Currently it is obligatory that each initiative has a consultation synopsis report summarizing the consultation outcome and including how different views were considered. Many of these reports are not yet available and are going to start gradually appearing on the website (interview with Commission official). Participants have in the past reported being disappointed and feeling “fooled” about the impact of their contributions (Winkler

2007), which may in part have been due to a lack of communication about what happened with their inputs, underlining the importance of transparency order to foster interest and trust in EU politics.

The amount of public input achieved is also not always as high as would be desired, this being related to how successful the choice and execution of a communication strategy is. “[...] we would like to increase the number of replies and feedback we get. So what we are going to do is to work with our communication experts in the house to have a few case studies working on a few different types of public consultations and see how we can best promote them and which impact we have” (interview with Commission official). The Commission official also emphasized the need to increase the response rate, noting that consultations which are promoted via social media or press releases show notably higher response rates: “In general we need to improve or increase the response rate. On average we have about 400–450 responses for each consultation [...]” There is also a connection between the participation of different sectors and their satisfaction with the process. “For instance [...] if we do a consultation in the field of the finance sector, all main stakeholders, they know [the tool], they can easily participate, they know it exists, [...] so they may have a higher satisfaction rate than for instance when we do a consultation in the field of agriculture. A lot of farmers are a lot less used to internet or difficult to reach, and they may then rather complain ‘we were not consulted’ or ‘we didn’t know’” (interview with Commission official). Also, the satisfaction rate of stakeholders who are present in Brussels is expected to be higher in terms of being able to participate.

A study by Kies (2016) identified four main issues with Your Voice in Europe, some of which have already been discussed above: lack of broad participation, lack of a forum for discussion with no space to “foster the emergence of European public” or “promote a transnational political identity”, no education programs addressing knowledge gaps concerning EU decision-making programs and lack of information as well as incentives for citizens to participate.

All in all the Your Voice in Europe platform as the European Commission’s “single access point” to a variety of consultations and feedback opportunities shows certain achievements as well as flaws and needs for improvement. It is recognized by the Commission as a tool for public policy which reaches out to a large number of potentially interested stakeholders and citizens, whose contributions are to varying degrees considered as one among various information sources in decision-making processes. It contributes to a level of accountability of the institution and there is some evidence of good quality in many consultation contributions as well as some impact on EU policies, favouring mainly the participation of civil society organizations rather than citizens. Main points for improvement are deficits in wider communication of this participation opportunity and involving the general public, more user-friendly and accessible web interface and consultation formats, more transparency of the use of contributions made and opportunities for exchange and deliberation among consultation participants.

9.4 European Citizens' Consultation

9.4.1 Introduction

The European Citizens' Consultations (ECC) were part of a "Plan D" (Democracy, Dialogue and Debate) launched by the European Commission in 2005. This plan was a direct reaction to the voters' rejection of the European Constitution. Plan D sought "*to foster communication and debate on the activities of the EU by addressing the need to listen to citizens' expectations*" on the future of the European Union. The plan contained six initiatives that had an online deliberative component. One of them was the European Citizens' Consultations in 2006–2007. This consultation process brought together more than 1800 citizens from 25 member countries on three topics chosen by participating citizens themselves: family and social welfare, environment and energy, and immigration and Europe's global role. The ECC was relaunched in 2009 under the Debate in Europe Program (2008) of the European Commission. In this case description we will focus on the 2009 initiative (ECC09).

The ECC 2009 aimed to be the first pan-European deliberative consultation involving the 27 Member States of the Union around the main question: "*What can the EU do to shape our economic and social future in a globalised world?*" The instrumental objectives—as mentioned in the evaluation report—were to promote interaction between citizens and policymakers, establish citizens as policy advisors and develop citizen participation as a policy tool for the future. The transformative aims were to close the gap between the EU and its citizens, to increase the general public's interest in the EU and to expand civil society networks across the EU, resulting in a more developed culture of active citizenship. The entire consultation was divided into five major phases which resulted in 15 shared propositions for EU economic and social policy in a globalized world:

1. In the first phase, that lasted from December 2008 until March 2009, all European citizens were invited online to discuss and elaborate proposals on what role the EU can play in shaping our economic and social future in a globalized world. The web portal consisted of one general European website with basic information and access to national websites.
2. In the second phase (March 2009) two days of group deliberation, meetings with experts, debates with (candidate) Members of European Parliament (MEPs) and voting were organized in each of the 27 Member States. The aim of this consultation round was to choose and elaborate on the 10 best propositions for action at the EU level at each national event.
3. In the third phase (April and May 2009) the generated 280 propositions were rephrased into 88 recommendations and divided into different domains (economy, employment, social policy, health, etc.). These recommendations were presented at each national website and all 1635 participants were asked to vote online or by mail for the 15 most interesting recommendations.

4. The fourth phase was a European Citizens' Summit held on May 10-11 in Brussels. About 150 citizens who took part in the national events were invited, reviewing their own 15 recommendations once more before handing them over and discussing them with top EU policymakers.
5. The final phase consisted of four thematic conferences (climate change, health, education and poverty) which took place in France, Ireland, Denmark and Slovakia. Citizens—also from neighbouring countries—were invited to discuss the final recommendations with newly elected MEPs.

In almost all phases of the consultation online and offline actions were combined. Each national website had the same structure: one information section (with texts written by a professional journalist), one debate section and one proposal and voting section. A web-based deliberation tool called VoDoO (Voting and Documentation Online) was used during the national consultations. The online discussion was moderated, allowing the moderator to delete messages without leaving any traces visible for the participants. Next to the moderator, somebody was responsible for outreach activities, encouraging stakeholders like political parties, NGOs and political bloggers, to participate in the online discussion or advertise the ECC project with banners on their own websites. The entire process was managed by the Belgian King Baudouin Foundation and a consortium of 40 European civil society organizations, foundations, universities and think tanks. The budget of 3.8 million euros was financed by 40 European charitable trust organizations and co-funded by the EC.

9.4.2 Participants

The target group of the ECC09 were the European citizens in general. In order to make an active contribution they were required to register at their national ECC09 website with a valid email address. They could still participate anonymously (interview with organizer and researcher). At the same time, people could easily register multiple times and no special attention was paid to security or privacy issues. A second interviewee (organizer and researcher) does not object to that: *"It is not like an important vote. It is just to give your opinion."*

In the first online phase, this system of open and self-selective recruitment *"created strong opportunities for interest groups and networks organized online to affect the outcome of the online consultations"* (Karlsson 2012a: 14). At the same time Badouard argues that the successful online mobilization of activist networks across national borders contributed to an important goal of the project: producing a European dynamic and transnational public in "spaces of creative action" (Badouard 2010: 107).

In order to obtain a demographically diverse group the second phase of national consultation started with a randomized selection process on general quotas for age, gender, professional status and region. Fifteen percent of the total budget of the

ECC09 was spent on the recruitment of 1600 participants by professional recruitment agencies. There was no specific method to include minorities like disabled people. Kies et al. (2013: 132) mention that there was a lot to be desired when it came to the representativeness of the national consultations, since there was overrepresentation of people who were “*highly educated, politically interested, and pro-EU*”. Only 3.8% of all participants were EU-sceptical, which “*produced an outcome that reflected what a predominantly and, in close to half of the cases, exclusively EU-positive body of participants recommended*” (Karlsson 2012a: 12).

Especially in the first phase an engagement strategy was important to get the target group of the ECC09—the European lay citizens—mobilized. An interviewee (organizer) reckons that “*it is always a system of auto-selection and it is difficult to captivate the interest of people for things they would not naturally [do]*”. The online communication campaign was especially successful in mobilizing EU-friendly networks and institutional websites that are visited by a well-educated public already familiar with European matters. In order to attract its target public, the lay citizens, “*the online phase could be improved by reinforcing the advertisement of the project among categories of the citizens who are generally not interested in (EU) politics*” (Kies and Wojcik 2010). Kies and Wojcik also argue that a collaboration between the mass media (in particular TV) and the Internet proves to be most effective to involve new citizens in the political process.

During the online consultation the web portal and national websites had almost 150,000 unique visitors, 29,536 registered users from January until May 2009, resulting in 5640 postings and 1142 proposals. Each national site received an average of just over 30 different visitors per day. In the second phase each national consultation had between 30 and 130 participants, involving a total of 1635 European citizens. In the third phase the broader European public was originally intended to be allowed to vote. Out of fear for organized groups being able to sway the voting, the organizers decided to only give a vote to the participants from the national consultations. In the end only less than 60% voted, caused by the absence of Internet for some users as well as a decreased interest after the consultation process. Kies et al. (2013: 62) also add: “*It could also be that the organizers underestimated the knowledge and capacities required for expressing preferences on such a large number of specialized proposals.*” The citizen summit in Brussels was attended by a selection of 150 representatives, selected on the basis of age, gender and nationality and also on the basis of proficiency in English.

Members of European Parliament and candidate MEPs were also participants in the consultation process of ECC09. Interestingly, according to Karlsson (2012b: 95) the online engagement between politicians and participants showed much more signs of cooperation than in the national offline deliberation, where they were polarized into the roles of producers and receivers of recommendations by the design of the project.

9.4.3 Participatory Process

In the first phase, participants could (1) post ideas or suggestions for a proposal for others to vote on, (2) take part in a debate about a proposal and (3) vote for (but not against) a proposal on their national websites. At this stage no transnational exchanges were possible (Badouard 2010). An important incentive for people to participate online was that the 10 most voted propositions were going to be discussed during the national face-to-face consultations. In total 1142 proposals were produced, which were distributed unevenly among the countries. Many proposals did not relate either to the topic of the consultation or to the EU. Among the most popular proposals we find environmental issues, drug legalization and the introduction of Esperanto as a work language in the EU (Kies and Wojcik 2010: 10).

Reviewing this online phase, Kies et al. (2013) conclude that some participants were very active, but over 80% were so-called lurkers who only read and voted on the proposals but did not get involved in the online debates. According to a survey these debates were in general reflexive and respectful with insightful and intelligent contributions.

In advance to the second phase, factsheets on the goals and intentions of the EU with regard to several social and economic issues were sent to the participants (Leyenaar and Niemoller 2010: 17). The 2-day national deliberation started with a shared decision that 10 ideas should be focused on. According to one interviewee (organizer) the online collected propositions did not play a big part: *“It could serve as an inspiration. But the participants of the face-to-face consultation, which was really the heart of the process, were not obliged to follow.”* On the second day, the participants co-drafted and voted on their recommendations. In each country experts were present to facilitate the participants’ discussion, share their views with participants and provide them with information about certain topics. A survey among the participants shows that they deliberated in an open, well thought-out and converging process and received good guidance and instructions whenever necessary (Leyenaar and Niemoller 2010: 5).

In the third phase, the resulting 280 proposals were downsized in 88 recommendations and made available on the national websites. All national participants were allowed to place one vote on each proposal, except for the proposals they had posted themselves. Registered participants of the first phase could also make comments on the recommendations. Each country determined, after debate and voting, 15 recommendations that would be presented during the Citizens’ Summit in Brussels. During this fourth phase 150 participants reviewed the final recommendations that had been selected on the first day. On the second day, the participants met with several top EU policymakers including the President of the European Parliament, the President of the European Commission and the President of the Committee of Regions. The recommendations were briefly presented to the policymakers by two participants and there was a discussion between them and the participants. One of the interviewed organizers refers to it as a “show”: *“Then the politicians started doing a sort of*

political propaganda. Not really taking the propositions seriously, which were so vague anyway that you couldn't do anything about them."

Kies et al. (2013: 64) mention one particular downside of a pan-European consultation process of the scale of the ECC09: loss of plurality. *"This danger results from the tension between, at one end of the spectrum, the plurality of opinions and proposals generated by hundreds of participants on- and offline and, at the other end of spectrum, the requirements for obtaining a limited number of clear recommendations supposedly shared by all the participants."* During all the phases the amount of proposals are downsized by either voting or editing. Although the loss of plurality is inevitable in consultation processes, in comparison to other more current citizens' consultations, with the ECC09 there is comparatively a large loss of plurality.

9.4.4 Results

ECC09 was *"a successful civic instrument but not a convincing policy instrument"* (Kies et al. 2013: 24). The interviewed organizer and researcher reflects: *"It was an effective way of gathering ideas and priorities bottom-up, from citizens all over Europe, but it lacked some important elements: a connection to the policy process, interest from politicians and political parties, transnational deliberation and sufficient marketing."* The second interviewee (organizer and researcher) adds: *"The main strength was civic power. [...] They even felt more European afterwards. They were feeling this sensation of European publics. [...] A second strength is probably the procedure itself. [...] It should have been integrated into the decision-making process, but in itself it's a very innovative procedure trying to consult people from twenty-eight countries."*

There are different reasons for the ECC not having had any policy impact. The most important one is probably that there was no official link between the consultation and the decision-making process. The European institutions were not obliged to provide feedback on the recommendations to the participants or give an official response for example. The ECC recommendations did not have any political mandate (Karlsson 2012b). In the interviews there were complaints that the ECC09 was not working towards a structural solution: *"They [European Union] are aware that we need to try to find new ways of involving citizens. So that's why they have been spending all this money. But then they are doing a one-shot experiment and they don't include it into the decision-making process. That is a problem. They don't think of a long-term solution for implementing citizen participation at the EU level. So, it cannot work. Then it's better to do nothing"* (interview, organizer).

Another reason for a lack of policy impact is a design problem: The scope of the subject of the consultation was too broad and vague. Kies et al. (2013: 64): *"The question of the social and economic future of Europe in a globalized world is indeed likely to attract almost infinite number opinions and critics on what should be done and how it should be implemented."* Karlsson adds that the wide scope of the issues

under debate also demanded a broad area of expertise of the participants. At the same time there was not enough information for the participants on what current policies there were in the areas under discussion. This resulted in recommendations of a very general character, too broad *“to give sufficient indication of citizen preferences, and in turn too broad to be useful as guiding recommendations in policymaking”* (Karlsson 2012b: 92–93).

Karlsson evaluated the ECC09 amongst MEPs. They expressed dissatisfaction with the content of the recommendations and the issues they highlighted. Karlsson recommends that there should have been a meet and greet between the MEPs and the participants at an earlier stage. That way they could have exchanged perspectives and knowledge before the content of the proposals was decided upon. Another reason why the consultation process was dissatisfying for the MEPs was that there were no specific groups of citizens involved. This makes the process less interesting for MEPs because it did not offer them *“new ways to communicate with their own constituents, or with a specific group of citizens sharing knowledge or experience that was needed within the realm of a specific policy debate”* (Karlsson 2012b).

With regard to the transformative objectives for developing a European identity, *“the survey results suggest a very high level of efficiency: with the exception of the time available, positive judgments of 85% or higher were recorded”* (Leyenaar and Niemoller 2010: 6). When the instrumental objectives are considered (i.e. whether the process had any policy impact), the consultation can neither be considered efficient nor cost effective. *“It had absolutely no impact. For me, it’s a scandal. It’s a lot of money. A lot of experiments that have been done. A lot of people that have been involved. A lot of energy with no outcome and no concrete proposal to say what are we doing now with all this experience that we’ve been gathering”* (interview, organizer).

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