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# Innovative participatory instruments for the EU

A policy brief

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## Key Recommendations

- Adopting a realistic stance by acknowledging the limited potential of PIs and focusing on their specific applications in order to avoid disappointments.
- Focusing on clear-cut functions and purposes in designing PIs that are adequately conceptualized and clearly stated, able to guide the design process and provide criteria for the success of a PI.
- Ensuring there is political follow-up to the proceedings and results of a PI – citizens must be able to understand and access how PIs actually impact politics and policy making.
- Attaching political responsibility to identifiable actors, making commitments that are visible in order to mount public pressure to hold responsible actors to account.



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## I. Introduction

Participatory innovations like deliberative polling or citizens forums are sophisticated mechanisms of public involvement that are associated with progressive hopes of reengaging citizens and making public authorities more responsive to their constituencies. Evaluating the potential benefits of such *participatory instruments* (PIs) at EU level is challenging since it involves great conceptual complexity as well as theoretical ambiguity and bears on thin empirical evidence. **Assessing the merits of citizen consultations and other forms of participatory instruments for the EU should take these theoretical and empirical complexities into account;** a failure to do so paves the way for initiatives and arrangements that disappoint political expectations of both public officials and European citizens. **This policy brief summarizes important conceptual distinctions, discusses best practices, and sketches policy recommendations that any approach to participatory instruments at EU level should take into account.**

## II. Conceptual distinctions

Although forms of public participation can emerge bottom-up (from civil society) or be initiated top-down (by public administrations respectively), the notion of a **participatory method or instrument (PI)** involves a process that is structured at least to some extent by public authorities. PIs thus refer to various mechanisms that have the goal of “involving members of the public in the agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organizations /institutions responsible for policy development”.<sup>1</sup> This practical goal, of course, can serve varying purposes; it can have different democratic functions and multiple further effects. The following important distinctions should be taken into account when analyzing the merits of PIs for the EU.

On a general level, we can distinguish three *types* of PIs along the lines of how information flows between public sponsors of the respective PI and the citizens.<sup>2</sup> When information flows from a public sponsor – e.g. a government or legislature – to its constituency or a specific (more or less organized) group of citizens, we speak of *public communication*. If citizens get involved to give their input *to* the public sponsor and information flows upwards to the government, we speak of public consultation. *Participation*, on the other hand, is the most elaborate public interaction since information and input flows in both directions:

Public communication	public sponsor → citizens
Public consultation	public sponsor ← citizens
Public participation	public sponsor ↔ citizens

As this account indicates, participation involves some degree of mutual interaction, of dialogue between the political/public sponsors of the PI and the citizens. Genuinely participatory instruments are thus more demanding than other forms of public engagement from the outset and they can feature various **purposes** and have different **functions** in order to achieve various **goals**. Three purposes serve well to structure the discussion of different forms of public participation: their *political, information and/or democratic* purpose.

PIs can serve **political purposes** if they are designed to further specific policy goals or reform efforts or to empower (the mandate of) particular political actors or institutions. For example, the Commission’s “Plan D (Democracy, Dialogue, Debate)” from 2005 aimed to install a European framework of deliberative participation with the stated “objective to build a new political consensus about the right policies” for the coming century.<sup>3</sup> Regarding the currently planned Conference on the Future of Europe, some MEPs want the (participatory) process of the Conference to be construed as an opportunity to an assertive return to the principle of “an ever closer Union”, paving the way to “a federal, European Republic” (MEP Daniel Freund, Greens). This kind of framing and using a PI can be politically instrumental. A purpose, however, which does not bear on the institutional benefits and democratic substance of PIs that advocates of participatory democracy expect and promote. In contrast, PIs may also have the purpose to transport, foster or change *information* and, most ambitiously, the *democratic* purpose to strengthen citizens’ popular control of those who govern. These two purposes characterize the principal merits of PIs – with more or less significance for the overall improvement of democratic systems.

The **information purpose of PIs** refers to the amount and quality of information or the dynamics of public opinion and discussion that are supposed to be improved by participatory mechanisms.<sup>4</sup> Such a purpose could be that public actors learn about the policy preferences of citizens or advance the administration's grasp of conditions for successful policy implementation. In this regard, PIs may function to foster collective information with the goal to advance better, evidence-based policymaking. On the other hand, citizens who participate in PIs may better understand the working of political processes and familiarize with policy issues. This can have a positive effect on their perception of public officials and institutions and bolster their understanding of political problems and priorities. Furthermore, PIs that employ procedures of *public deliberation* – where citizens are involved in structured debates on political issues – are designed to facilitate citizens' informed political opinions and considerate judgements. These PIs are attempts to rationalize public opinion with the objective to promote better and more legitimate policymaking.<sup>5</sup>

The **democratic purpose of PIs** is most demanding since the idea of democracy is to enable popular control of those who govern.<sup>6</sup> Individual participatory mechanisms can contribute to that purpose essentially in two ways. 1) PIs may involve citizens more directly into the formal political process itself: citizen initiatives or referendums defer real decision-making power to citizens with the goal to *empower* them – shifting political power away from public officials. 2) Furthermore, since democracy is the ideal of government of *all* the people, PIs may function to include more and especially underrepresented, marginalized voices with the goal to *improve the inclusiveness* of the democratic process and political decision making.

It is important to stress, however, that even PIs that manage to pursue a democratic purpose can neither replace classical channels of representation nor can they compensate for the continuing source of perceived legitimacy through the tangible act of voting.<sup>7</sup> Their added value is instrumental in that innovative **PIs can complement democratic systems**, their electoral regimes and societal foundations: PIs may “effect, retrofit formal political institutions with new capacities”.<sup>8</sup> Still, PIs may be of democratic value themselves if they fulfil or directly contribute to functions like public scrutiny or agenda-setting in an institutionalized way that systematically complements other existing democratic processes.<sup>9</sup>

### III. Context of current debates on participatory engagement at EU-level

In connection with the EU, the introduction of PIs to the European political system or process is currently discussed under the impression of two developments: First, a ubiquitous diagnoses of a (global) crisis of democracy and a substantive revival and diversification of (academic) research on democracy, partly in reaction to that.<sup>10</sup> And secondly, the planned *Conference on the Future of Europe* as part of the Commission's “new push for democracy”.<sup>11</sup> These factors seem to amount to “a timely moment to reflect on both the opportunities and the risks for the Union in fostering new forms of civic engagement”.<sup>12</sup> However, two corresponding aspects should be kept in mind when analyzing the potential of PIs for the EU.

1) We should be wary of the potential of PIs to counteract the “deconsolidation of liberal democracies” that trouble many democratic politicians and scholars.<sup>13</sup> The perceived crises of democratic institutions are part of a larger context of structural societal changes and arguably symptomatic of *sociocultural, economic* and *technological* developments and problems.<sup>14</sup> It is not apparent how PIs could alter these underlying, structural reasons of democratic distress – which does not mean to deny their potential benefit for democracy per se. This point also applies to their **potential to enhance public trust**. It is commonplace to lament the alleged decline of citizens' trust into governments and the European institutions in particular. Notwithstanding this general conviction, the question of how to measure levels of public trust and which factors explain its dynamics over the decades is a highly complex question.<sup>15</sup> Regarding the potential of PIs to counteract the (perceived) decline of public trust, we should, again, adopt a realistic stance: if the changes and potential crisis of “trust in government” bear on larger, societal shifts, economic and ecological transformations, it is conceivable that PIs have no chance of influencing public trust in a significant way. At the same time, the **limited potential of PIs in the context of (fundamental) political crises should not frustrate but focus our expectations of them**.<sup>16</sup>

2) The pending *Conference on the Future of Europe* should neither give wings to our hopes to reform European democracy nor captivate possible applications of PIs at the EU-level. The debate on the EU's democratic future is fairly consolidated in the sense that the fundamental obstacles for a genuine democratization of the EU's political system have been laid out and discussed extensively.<sup>17</sup> The crucial question with regard to the EU's democratic future is whether there will be political will to remove these obstacles and buy into the further steps of integration that will certainly accompany any progress on democratization. But this also means that – reflecting on the purposes and goals

of European PIs – **participatory experimentation and probing can be of general interest from the perspective of institutional design and should not be discarded right when the process of the Conference will be concluded.**

#### IV. Problems in designing PIs and best practices examples

Having sketched some important conceptual issues, the possible functions and goals of PIs, this section reviews best practice examples and poorly executed PIs, discussing their significance for the EU context. We will highlight key take-aways and policy recommendations.

The *European Citizens Consultations (ECCs)* are in several regards an example of a poorly designed and exercised PI. The ECCs were conducted in 2018, following the initiative of French president Macron. They consisted of two different participatory channels: at the transnational level, the Commission launched an online survey consisting of questions previously formulated by a Citizen's Panel. At the member state level, national governments agreed to organize *Citizen Consultations* domestically – which was generally perceived as an advantage of the exercise.<sup>18</sup> The outcome of both processes would eventually be discussed at the European Council in December 2018. Reviewing the process, the extensive evaluation report concluded that “an unstructured and under-funded process such as that which unfolded through the ECCs never stood a chance of generating a critical mass of activities to fix the EU's democratic dilemmas. While this is partly due to the short timeframe, flaws in the process design also meant that it was unlikely the results would have been any different even if there had been more time to carry them out”.<sup>19</sup>

We can draw important lessons from the relative failure of the ECCs as a European participatory instrument – which projected to counter the EU's democratic shortcomings by getting citizens to debate on European issues and making them “feel that their leaders are listening to them”.<sup>20</sup> First, **the results of the ECCs were not connected to a meaningful and transparent follow-up process.** Due to member states' (political) disagreement on the design, identity and scope of the ECCs, the process **lacked a clear public sponsor who would eventually be politically responsible to effectively respond to citizens' input.**

The results of the ECCs silted up in proceedings and opinions of the Council with no visible feedback loops. The ongoing *Citizens' Consultations* that are conducted directly by the Commission confirm this problem: the “key conclusions” of 1,575 (town-hall style) citizens' dialogues resulted in a 2019 report, which finds that “all in all, participants in the debate on the Future of Europe would like the European Union to focus on topics that are already at the heart of the European agenda, notably the ten political priorities of the Juncker Commission”.<sup>21</sup> In its accompanying progress report to the European Council, the Commission states that the “feedback to our Citizens' dialogues shows how keen Europeans are ... to have an impact on how our Union moves forward”.<sup>22</sup> But did they actually have an impact? While the large number of conducted consultations arguably amounted to a potent public outreach campaign, there are **poor to no means for citizens to understand and access how such PIs actually impact EU politics and policy making.**<sup>23</sup>

The *Convention on the Constitution of Ireland*, on the other hand, is celebrated by researchers and commentators as a best practice example of a participatory instrument – sparking further applications with the *Irish Citizens' Assembly* some years later. In particular, the Irish Convention provided a clear follow-up perspective and managed to have manifest impact on the content of the constitutional amendments. It ran from 2012 to 2014 and brought together 66 randomly selected citizens, yet chosen to reflect the age, regional, and gender balance of the Irish population.<sup>24</sup> 33 legislators from the Irish Parliament were also part of the assembly. Importantly, the Convention was mandated to debate on eight specific issues – i.e. constitutional amendments. Although the government was not formally obliged to proceed on any of the amendment proposals passed by the Convention, **the government committed itself to respond to them and debate them publicly.** Three proposals were eventually put to public referendum and the Irish citizens, under great public attention, mandated legal same-sex marriage to the constitution.

Contrary to the ECCs and the Commission's Consultations, the Irish Convention had a clear **focus on specific policy issues**, some of which were **of high political salience.** The PI was not a general – and conceivably generic – exercise of “listening to the citizens” but managed to *engaged* them in a public debate on concrete issues like the legalization of same-sex marriage. This pertained to the process being accompanied by **steady media attention**, becoming part of “normal” political discourse in Irish politics. These factors, in turn, provided **public pressure on the legislatures and executives** to deal with the results of the Convention officially – which went so far that the Irish prime minister had to apologize for a delay in processing the Convention's results. Adding to that, the Irish **government committed itself to follow up on the Convention's results** beforehand. Generally speaking, the deliberative platform of the Irish Convention did “not occur in isolation, but rather as part of the wider political system”.<sup>25</sup>

Several successful aspects of the Irish case – like the concrete policy focus and political commitments – are suitable to guide the design and improvement of EU-level participatory instruments as well. But other features call attention to the

**structural obstacles that exist for the EU's complex multilevel system.** These should **curb our expectations of European PIs.** For once, the tenuous condition of European public spheres makes it hard for PIs to mount public pressure on officials or mobilize citizens to begin with. Furthermore, the non-traditional, often ambiguous constellation of political responsibility in the EU's multilevel governance arrangements make it hard to integrate PIs into "normal politics" of government, opposition and parliament.

The previous discussion points to the crucial distinction between the ability of PIs to facilitate **citizen input** vs. their ability to facilitate **citizen empowerment**.<sup>26</sup> If citizens' participation is not connected with any formal power of agenda-setting, decision-making or veto, then it cannot fulfil the goal of empowering citizens via-a-vis formal political institutions and actors.

The planned *Conference on the Future of Europe* is a case in point here: Whereas the stated opinion of the European Council features the expectation that the participatory process of the conference should focus on citizen *input* on essential policy areas,<sup>27</sup> various civil society organizations demand that the conference must *empower* citizens politically.<sup>28</sup> In a different way, several political actors in Brussels expect the Conference to offer strategical political empowerment, dismissing the importance of mere input from citizens: referring to EUROBAROMETER and other public opinion data, some MEPs note that "we know what citizens want", maintaining that "we need the citizens to create pressure on Council and Commission" instead. There is an obvious conflict between the perspective of involving citizens for matters of (a more or less deliberative) input on several EU policy areas and the political ambition to mount public pressure on particular institutional actors. For the sake of managing expectations and the Conference **having a clear mandate as a PI**, it would be **important to agree on the scope of its purpose(s) in this regard** – which obviously is difficult, given the multiplicity of stakeholders and opposing political interests involved in mandating the Conference.

The conflict over the purpose of the Conference on the Future of Europe points to a general problem of PIs that focus on facilitating citizens input in order to make better policy: several PIs have been devised in the private sector; service-orientation and the "design" of efficient solutions are the main focus here. These forms of PIs have a depoliticized understanding of the purpose of public participation in that it should not function to empower citizens but foster their knowledge and preferences in order to optimize policymaking. **Design Thinking** aims to crowdsource solutions to (public) policy problems: intricate digital mechanisms and participatory feedback-loops are construed to harvest ideas and policy innovation. For example, the Foresight Initiative of the Commission recently launched *Futurium* as a "policy-making 3.0" platform for "evidence-based and participatory policy-making":<sup>29</sup> "Futurium facilitates the joint creation of ideas to help design future policies. It does so by incorporating different variables, reflecting both emotional and rational mind-sets – i.e. using front-end participatory tools, knowledge-harvesting tools (for both policymakers and stakeholders), data-crawling tools (from social networks), and data-gathering tools (from real world data)".<sup>30</sup>

Yet, in contrast to the perspective of capturing innovative and efficient solutions via PIs the most salient policy areas in EU politics do not allow for ideologically neutral, unambiguously "better" solutions. European electorates and political elites are divided along the lines of contentious issues like migration, social welfare and taxation, monetary policy or liberal rights. **It is not the lack of evidence or data that hinders progress on these policies but more or less profoundly conflicting value judgements and the ways in which the formal political process is set up in the European institutions.** PIs that aim to make better policy by fostering the "collective wisdom of stakeholders and policymakers" are inadequate devices to address the democratic shortcomings of the EU. Such innovative tools of design thinking may indeed benefit public officials in enhancing their understanding of trends in public perception and opinion. Their democratic value, if any, is very indirect; in isolation, they exhibit no tangible connection to factors that influence political trust or citizen empowerment.

A different, very influential strand of designing PIs is the tradition of **deliberative democracy**. In contrast to Design Thinking, deliberative democratic PIs want to combine the information purpose of facilitating citizens (enlightened) input *and* the democratic purpose of empowering their political judgement. The advocates of such PIs at EU-level hope that these may 1) change peoples' political judgements on the bases of informed debate and 2) build public trust by bringing the European institutions and processes "closer to the citizens". These functions are the main selling points of deliberative democratic PIs: deliberative democracy is not about the harvesting of information, preferences or ideas but aims to rationalize public opinion formation. Deliberative forums, polls or conventions are expected to reach considered political judgements since they involve citizens into moderated debates requiring them to engage in considering competing arguments. Deliberation is about *weighing*, expressing the basic principle that political opinions and respective choices *should* not be based on arbitrary views and preferences – "the root of deliberative democracy is that the people should weigh the arguments, the competing reasons, offered by their fellow citizens".<sup>31</sup>

There is a large amount of experimentation with deliberative democratic PIs: they are provided to complement the democratic process in all its stages, from agenda-setting to decision-making. A much-noticed example is the project *What's Next California* (WNC). In 2011, a state-wide sample of registered voters was convened to deliberate extensively about the state's problems that should be addressed politically: "what proposals would the voters of California support on the basis of actually discussing competing arguments for and against those proposals and after getting good information about them?".<sup>32</sup> Quite a few commentators and civil society advocates consider this scenario to be a

desirable model for European PIs – especially for the sake of preparing a convention on treaty change and developing a European constitution.<sup>33</sup>

But when we zoom in on the added value of deliberative PIs like the WNC initiative and review its procedural and substantive preconditions, we encounter major problems regarding the prospects of applying these models at EU-level. The great challenge for instruments of deliberative democracy is to be *representative* in order to satisfy the democratic condition of political equality. The strength of contemporary deliberative designs bears on statistics insofar as they must **ensure that the sample of deliberating citizens is representative of the whole constituency**: deliberative PIs must create “a mini-public or microcosm of the whole population that could deliberate on selected issues and offer a conclusion that had binding force on the issue in question”.<sup>34</sup> But in the case of the EU, the population from which we need to sample from is vast and extremely diverse. The deliberative samples would need to be rather large and elaborately controlled for representativeness. Now, such technical issues might be accounted for and prominent European scholars and civil activists have indeed called for establishing **randomly selected European “citizens’ assemblies” for specific purposes**.<sup>35</sup>

But the greater democratic purpose of deliberative PIs hinges on structural requirements that the EU lacks. The WNC, like the Irish Convention, took place among **a relatively integrated electorate**: in the sense that, first, the PIs tapped into the political identities of the (US-American) State and the Nation respectively and, second, the PIs were embedded in the consolidated public spheres of these established polities. The Irish and Californian case were not limited to facilitate mere input but able to contribute to *public-will formation* because they were embedded in unitary public spheres.

We can draw two kinds of lessons from these problems of “scaling up” deliberative democratic PIs to EU-level. One might deal with the structural features of the EU’s multilevel polity by **designing potential European PIs to focus on very specific functions or to apply them to specific policy areas**.

Consider the case of *Participatory Budgeting in the City of Paris*. Participatory budgeting is a well-established, sometimes intricate process to give citizens direct decision-making power over parts of the public budget.<sup>36</sup> In Paris, the government devised a 5% share of the public budget to be available for participatory budgeting: all residents of Paris – regardless of age or nationality – could submit proposals for projects and respective spending items.<sup>37</sup> Special attention was given to the mobilization of groups with lower participation rates and lower incomes. The EU has utilized participatory budgeting as well. However, it did so only in external funding schemes like the *ERB-AL*, a regional cooperation program that involved sub-national governments in the EU and Latin America.<sup>38</sup> But it is conceivable to experiment with forms of participatory budgeting in selected areas of (internal) EU policy as well. In the fields of agriculture or cohesion, the EU organizes well-established programs like the Cohesion Fund, the EAGF and the EAFRD. **The managing and allocation of these funds could be complemented with participatory budgeting instruments**. The policy areas are clearly defined, and the stakeholders share common “issue publics” which would counteract the structural problems of PIs at EU-level. This consideration illustrates that European PIs are likely to have more chance of success if they are both constraint in their thematic scope and function – here: devise specific public funds in a specific policy area.

## V. Recommendations

To conclude, we summarize four general recommendations that any assessment of the potential merits of participatory instruments at EU-level should take into account. In designing European, public participation one should:

- **Devise a realistic approach and framing of the PI** — Participatory instruments should be equipped with a purpose that does not overstretch its normative ambitions. One should be especially cautious with regard to expectations and narratives of democratic restitution that claim to counteract the EU’s democratic deficit with public participation: individual PIs are no antidote to European populism or the (perceived) crisis of democratic institutions. Taking a realistic stance is imperative to avoid disappointments with citizens and critique or mockery of activists and scholars.
- **Focus: determine a clear-cut purpose and concrete functions of the PI** — The structural characteristics of the EU’s multi-level system and the general challenge of “scaling up” more sophisticated mechanisms of PIs – especially deliberative models – suggest that European PIs should be highly focused. PIs must have a purpose that is adequately conceptualized and clearly stated, able to guide the design process and provide criteria for the success of the PI. Furthermore, it is important to provide the PIs with a specific and narrow focus regarding both the policy area they are supposed to cover (like agriculture) and the function that they should perform (like democratic experimentation or participatory budgeting)

- **Ensure the embeddedness of the IP in the (further) policy making process** — A particular failure of PIs is the lack of a proper follow-up process by political decision-makers to their results. Both citizens and political sponsors are disappointed when PIs lack meaningful political impact; it should at least be ensured that (public) feedback loops reveal how the PI is connected and how its results are processed in the “normal” political process.
- **Attach political responsibility to identifiable actors, make commitments!** Various important requirements, like the engagement of the (larger) public and a proper follow-up process, depend on the existence and visibility of politically responsible actors. If not for a formal provision, it is important to facilitate at least self-commitments of public actors to officially consider the process and the results of the PI. Such commitments should be visible in order to mount public pressure to hold responsible actors to account.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Rowe and L.J. Frewer (2005) A typology of public engagement mechanisms. *Science, Technology & Human Values*, 30(2), pp. 251–290.

<sup>2</sup> G. Rowe and Frewer (2005) A typology of public engagement mechanisms, pp. 53f.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission (2005) Press release: European Commission launches PLAN D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate. Brussels, 13 October 2005, IP/05/1272.

<sup>4</sup> In political science and democratic theory, scholars refer to these aspects of democratic and/or participatory processes as *epistemic* aspects.

<sup>5</sup> For a good overview see Bächtiger et al. (2018) Deliberative Democracy – an introduction. In: Ibid. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–31.

<sup>6</sup> For a good presentation of this account of the fundamental value of democracy see P. Pettit (2008) Three conceptions of democratic control. *Constellations*, 15(1), pp. 46–55.

<sup>7</sup> J. Fishkin (2018) *Democracy when the people are thinking*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> M. Warren (2009) Citizen Participation and Democratic Deficits: Considerations from the Perspective of Democratic Theory. In: J. DeBardeleben et al. (eds.) *Activating the Citizen*. Palgrave Macmillan, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> There certainly are different accounts of democracy and radical proposals that view public participation as a more fundamental mode of overhauling representative government, especially in the context of multilevel governance, for example in J. Cohen and A. Sabel (1997) Directly-deliberative polyarchy. *European Law Journal* 3(4), pp. 313–342.

<sup>10</sup> See for example A. Przeworski (2019) Crises of democracy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; R. Foa and Y. Mounk (2016) The democratic disconnect. *Journal of Democracy* 27(6), pp. 5–17; W. Merkel (2015) Challenge or Crisis of Democracy. In: W. Merkel and S. Kneip (eds.) *Democracy and crises. challenges in turbulent times*. Cham: Springer International, pp. 1–29.

<sup>11</sup> U. von der Leyen (2019) A Union that strives for more. (Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019–2024). Brussels, OCT 2019.

<sup>12</sup> G. Sgueo (2020) The practice of democracy. A selection of civic engagement initiatives. (European Parliamentary Research Service). Brussels, JUN 2020, PE 651.970, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> R.S. Foa and Y. Mounk (2017) Signs of Deconsolidation. *Journal of Democracy* 28(1), pp. 5–15.

<sup>14</sup> Compare, for example, Y. Mounk (2018) *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom is in Danger and How to Save It*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; A. Reckwitz (2019) Die Krise des Liberalismus und die Suche nach dem neuen politischen Paradigma: Vom aper-tischen zum einbettenden Liberalismus. In: *Das Ende der Illusionen. Politik, Ökonomie und Kultur und der Spätmoderne*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, pp. 239–305.

<sup>15</sup> (Reliable) social scientific research on political trust, however, is very challenging. At the same time, even the general metrics that survey trust in national and European institutions paint a complex picture that does not ground clear-cut diagnoses. EUROBAROMETER data, for example, finds that levels of in EU institutions fluctuate over the years yet settle around 43% while fluctuations are closely aligned with trust in national government and parliament. Compare M. Levi & L. Stoker (2000) Political trust and trustworthiness. *Annual Review of Political Science* 3, pp. 475–507; Standard Eurobarometer 93 – Summer 2020, first results: <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion>, p.6.

<sup>16</sup> For a comprehensive study on the state of research on participatory innovations and a theoretical account of their meanings for representative democratic regimes see W. Merkel (2015) Nur schöner Schein? Demokratische Innovationen in Theorie und Praxis. (OBS-Arbeitsheft 80). Frankfurt am Main: Otto-Brenner-Stiftung.

<sup>17</sup> For an overview see G. Abels (2020) Legitimität, Legitimation und das Demokratiedefizit der Europäischen Union. In: P. Becker and B. Lippert (eds.) *Handbuch Europäische Union*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 175–193.

<sup>18</sup> Compare P. Butcher and S. Pronckutè (2019) European Citizens’ Consultations: Consultation begins at home. *European View* 18(1), pp. 80–88.

<sup>19</sup> European Policy Centre & The Democratic Society (2018) The European Citizens’ Consultations - evaluation report. November 2018. Rapporteurs: C. Stratulat & P. Butcher.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> European Commission (2019) Citizens' dialogues and citizens' consultations – Key conclusions. Brussels, 30 April, p. 9.

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- <sup>22</sup> European Commission (2019) European Commission Contribution to the European Council: Citizens' Dialogues and Citizens' Consultations – Progress report. Brussels, 11 December, p. 3.
- <sup>23</sup> (Activist) scholars like Alberto Alemanno who advocate participatory democracy/European PIs conclude accordingly that “in practice, EU participatory channels are not intended to impact directly how decisions are made, but simply to legitimize existing policy approaches”, in: A. Alemanno (2018) Beyond Consultations: Reimagining EU participatory politics. (Carnegie Europe Policy Paper). Brussels, DEC 2018, p. 2.
- <sup>24</sup> Official homepage: <http://www.constitutionalconvention.ie/Convention.aspx>.
- <sup>25</sup> D.M. Farrell, J. Suiter and C. Harris (2019) “Systematizing” constitutional deliberation: the 2016–18 citizens’ assembly in Ireland. *Irish Political Studies*, 34(1), pp. 113–123.
- <sup>26</sup> Warren (2009) Citizen Participation and Democratic Deficits: Considerations from the Perspective of Democratic Theory, p. 29.
- <sup>27</sup> As of today, 19 NOV 2020, the inter-institutional negotiations on the form, mandate and chair of the *Conference on the Future of Europe* are still ongoing. It is not expected that the Conference will start within the German Council Presidency, which ends on the 31 DEC this year.
- <sup>28</sup> See e.g. the “10 principles for a citizen-centered Conference on the Future of Europe” of the *Citizens Take Over Europe* coalition: <https://citizenstakeover.eu/ten-principles>.
- <sup>29</sup> F. Accordino (2013) The Futurium – a foresight platform for evidence-based and participatory policymaking. *Philosophy & Technology*, 26(3), pp. 321–332.
- <sup>30</sup> G. Sgueo (2020) The practice of democracy. A selection of civic engagement initiatives, p. 35.
- <sup>31</sup> J. Fishkin (2018) *Democracy when the people are thinking*, p. 26.
- <sup>32</sup> J. Fishkin, T. Kousser, R. Lushkin and A. Siu (2015) Deliberative agenda setting: piloting reform of direct democracy in California. *Perspectives on Politics*, 13(4), pp. 1030–42.
- <sup>33</sup> See e.g. the projects and principles of “EUMANS!”: <https://www.eumans.eu>.
- <sup>34</sup> J. Fishkin (2018) *Democracy when the people are thinking*, pp. 69f.
- <sup>35</sup> Compare P. Schmitter & A. Treschel (eds.) (2017) Green paper on the Future of Democracy in the European Union for the Council of Europe. (European University Institute, San Domenico de Fiesole).
- <sup>36</sup> For an overview and conceptual map see Y. Sintomer et al. (2012) Transnational models of citizen participation: the case of participatory budgeting. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 8(2), art. 9. For the history and current standing of participatory budgeting see also C. Pateman (2012) Participatory Democracy Revisited. *Perspectives on Politics* 10(1), pp. 7–19.
- <sup>37</sup> Official homepage: <https://budgetparticipatif.paris.fr/bp>.
- <sup>38</sup> G. Sgueo (2016) Participatory budgeting. An innovative approach. (European Parliamentary Research Service). Brussels, JAN 2016, PE 573.894, p. 4.

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