



European Citizens Crowdsourcing project

(EUCROWD)

www.inepa.si/eucrowd

EUCROWD EVENT SUMMARY REPORT

Taking control of politics: can digital democracy help?

(London, UK)

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www.demsoc.org

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SECTION 1: DESCRIPTION OF EVENT

I. Information about event

Venue	Newspeak House, London, UK
Start date	Thursday 9th February 2017
End date	Thursday 9th February 2017
Title of event	"Taking control of politics: can digital democracy help?"
Type of event	Workshops and Meetup
No. of participants	35
No. of involved countries	15
Web site	www.demsoc.org/eu-crowdsourcing
Event report	www.inepa.si/eucrowd/2017/02/27/report-eucrowd-event-london

II. Description of event

The event was arranged into formal facilitated workshops for the main focus of the day and a more informal evening networking, or "meet-up", in order to encourage diversity of attendance - both people who were able to dedicate time to participate during the working day and people who could only attend outside working hours.

On arrival for the workshop sessions, participants were invited to share their thoughts about crowdsourcing on an "ideas wall" using post-it (sticky) notes to start their thinking about some central themes of the event. The questions asked were:

- What does democracy mean to you?
- Why do only some people participate in democracy?
- What is the best way to interact with government decision-making?
- What would you like to see or do now?

Participants then sat down in groups around tables to begin the formal workshops sessions and were asked to introduce themselves to each other.

Millicent Scott Brooks (The Democratic Society) introduced the day, inviting Simon Delakorda (INePA) to introduce the project and then Elisa Lironi (ECAS) to explain what is meant by "crowdsourcing" in this context.

Following these introductions, three experts presented examples of crowdsourcing from around Europe to frame the conversations for the day. They were: Kelly McBride from The Democratic Society in Scotland, Valdis Porneiks from Mana Balss in Latvia and Vassilis Giannakopolous from SciFY in Greece.

Participants were then asked to discuss and answer the first central question of the day "What can be crowdsourced?". These discussions were held in small groups at the tables and discussions were

facilitated and scribed by staff from The Democratic Society and INePA. The purpose of the facilitator was to ensure that all participants had an opportunity to input and to ensure that an accurate and agreed record was kept of the conversation so that the shared understanding could be communicated in this report.

The second central question was, "When in the European legislative process crowdsourcing would be helpful?" But in order to be able to answer this, The Democratic Society needed to ensure that participants were familiar with the basics of this process. Daniel Ambrus from the European Commission representation in the UK therefore gave an overview of the legislative process and, in a lively session, answered questions from participants about it.

The third and final central question of the day, also answered in facilitated small groups, was, "If we were to use a tool for crowdsourcing, what features should it have? Are there any existing platforms that could be good for this purpose?"

After these sessions the workshops were drawn to a close and participants were once again invited to share their thoughts on the ideas wall. Additional participants arrived for the less formal evening networking session and were invited to contribute their thoughts and ideas to the increasing ideas wall and to discuss with those who had been there during the workshops.

The following pages summarise the facilitated discussions.

III. Citizens involvement during event and target groups / stakeholders presence

Citizens participated in debates and discussions verbally in workshop groups with facilitators from project partner organisations. They also contributed towards an "ideas wall" where they were asked to write down their ideas in response to questions - or to contribute a question. These ideas are shared in Appendix 2.

Citizens were encouraged to tweet about the event. An overview of Twitter activity is available at

<https://storify.com/MissMillicent/eucrowdsourcinglondon>

<https://twitter.com/i/moments/856417996486713344>

Those present at the event included students, entrepreneurs, NGOs, experts, government ministry employers, European institutions representatives, software developers, academics, think tank CEOs.

SECTION 2: DISCUSSION ON CROWDSORCING IN THE EU POLICY-MAKING

IV. What were general considerations on using crowdsourcing in politics?

Conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned from discussions and workshops.

There were no agreed conclusions, but rather a collection of ideas and suggestions, together with

some central questions and observations that would need careful consideration when making the decision about which tools to use or how to build them. These included:

- What is the role of the people administering and curating the platform? Can they censor or edit ideas or discussion?
- Where is the democracy in the platform? Is it a tool for e-democracy, or is it a tool where policy is co-created?
- Who owns the platform and the data on it? Who can access that data? How safe is it?
- Can privacy be guaranteed? The technical challenges in ensuring privacy on such a platform are significant.
- There needs to be decentralised data processing.
- Any platform would need the ability to integrate online and offline participation and give people the option for both to be equally recognised.
- How can it be monitored who is participating and if they are entitled to do so? In the UK we have no ID cards or person numbers, so identifying ourselves securely online is a problem.
- Crowdsourcing is more than information gathering. When used effectively it should be co-creating.
- Inputs - emotions, data, best practices : Outputs - legislation, processes, changed opinion.

V. Which policies could to be crowdsourced at EU level in relation to the future of Europe?

Sensitive issues would not be appropriate for crowdsourcing. If the issue is widely discussed it could be appropriate.

Ideally it is an investment in policy-making and should not be used to save time or money, but it is inherently political, and dependent on who is in power and how they want to make decisions and how much they want to share responsibility for decision making (co-decision) or how much they want to inform government decision making. The crowdsourcing process should be part of the legislative process as part of bottom-up policy-making and e-devolution.

Crowdsourcing can be misused as a means of political control, for example for evidencing a political decision, if the data is manipulated.

The most suitable issues should be tangible and real ones that people have the knowledge and experience to be able to input into. There should be a close connection between the topic and the person's life. For example, National security is not something people commonly perceive to be part of every day life and decisions about this would need insight and expertise to be able to input into, whereas decisions about shaping the local community or healthcare provision would be more appropriate.

Crowdsourcing should not be used to ask people to make decisions about incomparable spends: eg decide between funding cleaning parks, after school care clubs, or local police crime commissioner.

Policy fields which would be suitable for crowdsourcing include:

- Education – citizenship education
- Constitutional issues – national discussions on citizen's convention, devolution, constitutional structure and arrangements

- Local spending decisions
- Social issues – people felt that in some cases, politicians act in a way which is contrary to popular commonly held view points or opinions. The concern here was that they can sometimes be behind or less progressive than the public, with the example of Northern Irish abortion laws and open public disagreement reported in media.
- Healthcare
- Human rights and equalities – example of consultation round access to universities for disabled students in Scotland. Was a real and tangible thing targeting lots of people who had direct experience of this and were able to usefully contribute – this helps widen out consultations to reach different communities and groups which are usually not heard.
- Environmental policy could be good to develop through crowdsourcing, for example whether or not to build on a green belt.

The type of data that can be crowdsourced can be split into 4 types:

1. Ideas
2. Data
3. Opinions
4. Labour

Further types of data that can be crowdsourced include:

Constitutions

- Organisational, political and not just national

Reports

- Presentation of info

Campaigns

- Focus
- Policy asks
- E.g. More United and 38 degrees

Planning communities

- Evidence testing – very expensive, and longwinded so ignored
- Suggestions for community
- Neighbourhood plans

Save labour time and energy

- To save from reinventing the wheel, crowdsource ideas and share successes

VI. What are e-participation examples relevant for a crowdsourcing pilot at the EU level?

1) EU should not create its own tool

One group believed firmly that the EU should not create its own tool, but instead use existing tools or open source to build on existing material, whereas another group discussed the criteria for developing a platform.

Those who did not want to create a single platform agreed on the below:

It must be a platform that integrates what happens offline. For example, in town halls, kitchens and other community spaces. The platform cannot be exclusively digital as this would mean excluding

people and practices - which would be undemocratic.

We would need to have decentralised platforms and blockchain to address privacy issues and allow people to own the data and share with the people of their choosing.

There would need to be consensus around the purpose of the platform and the branding and framing of it. For example, when and where would "crowdsourcing" be used?

Although this idea was controversial among the group, participants discussed how Artificial Intelligence (AI) could play a greater role in policy-making. AI could interpret masses of data to advise the best courses of action. Greater use of AI could possibly address issues with representativeness and understanding data by lessening the subjective and interpretive aspects of policy-making.

Education systems must become decentralised. Each school should experiment with their teaching methods and material. The resultant data should be gathered continuously and results exchanged between schools to evaluate and adapt to best results.

There was concern about the creation of one single platform to manage crowdsourcing, or the idea of one single platform acting as an aggregator for multiple platforms. This would create a "winner takes all" scenario and potentially quash innovation.

There was a strong preference for an 'open source' approach, including platforms, code, data, hardware and software.

Accountability is a big issue. Citizens would have to be able to see how people they elected voted. Politicians would have to engage with citizens on this platform.

2) If the EU were to create a crowdsourcing platform

The other group agreed that there should be an official crowdsourcing platform, but that this should not be the only place to participate. If the EU were to create a crowdsourcing platform, there are some key considerations that should be borne in mind: accessibility, usability, the opportunity to participate and integration.

- Accessibility

There should be clear text adhering to the Plain English guide. There could be a glossary of terms (highlighted words) to help people understand the texts. They could try to explain a policy in a sentence to keep explanations as concise as possible. It should also be possible to access this online platform in multiple places, such as having public spaces with access to the internet set up for this purpose e.g. ipads in pubs with surveillance.

- Usability

Ease of use is very important – underpinning the development should be good strategic design because user experience research in democracy is limited and this is not usually considered. There should also be a low-tech threshold for those with limited tech literacy. There needs to be a tradeoff between having numerous features and overwhelming the participant with information. If this balance is not correct, this could affect the take-up from participants. This should be playful

and fun, as current platforms are not inviting to participants.

- Opportunity to participate

There should be an opportunity to view, comment, suggest, edit and contribute in the law making process. This was referred to as a desire for a 'Google docs of politics'. Building and refining of ideas should be aim of public dialogue. Editable contributions would be good because existing platforms to participate can be too binary, example of 38 degrees where you cannot edit or change your response e.g. 'I would sign this if I could say something slightly different'. Should have option to edit your own response, such as an option if you change your mind, allowing the participant to explain why which would give rich qualitative data on people's opinion.

- Integration

Instead of building another platform the EU could build something that integrates what already exists. Crowdsourcing should be done by going to platforms where people are already participating and which they regularly use because building something new and expecting people to use it could fail. There is a need to integrate platforms and aggregate content to bring the conversations together so platforms share data (API). An example to illustrate this is numerous liftshare/carshare sites and apps where people go to look for carshares. It would be more useful if there was a single place for all this data. The platform should ensure you see other views (through algorithms perhaps) and should ensure content and opportunity to participate comes to you through offering sign up to topics of interest. There should also be consideration given to the login or registration of users because complex verification and authentication procedures to participate can be barriers to participation. It was felt that an official platform would have the necessary credibility to integrate the other existing platforms, using the example of the commonly used government e-petitions website which has credibility, perhaps more than other sites.

A third group considered the features that a successful crowdsourcing platform, whether existing, developing or being created, would need to have in place:

- Voting
- Option to submit ideas/issue identification
- Ability to set the agenda (crowdsourcing from the outset, not consulting on pre-formed ideas)
- registration/verification
- Ability for anonymity
- ability to support your arguments by uploading files and related documentation etc.
- interoperability with other tools
- marketplace of services
- accessibility/translation
- advocates/mechanisms to include offline input (option to participate in crowdsourcing should not be limited to online only)
- Ease of sharing information
- Tools for collaboration
- It must be open-source
- It must integrate features into platform and process.

Some direct examples that participants in the London event knew about included:

Citizens' Foundation, Iceland
Participare - Catalonia
Democracit
Vouliwatch.gr
Delib
Quora
Debating Europe
Your Data Stories
EU Votewatch
Fix My Community
Geovey
<https://genius.com/Genius-how-genius-works-annotated>
<https://hypothes.is/>
Co-authoring online site: <https://www.discuto.io/>

VII. When in policy-making would the crowdsourcing take place?

Participants at this event thought that the answer to when crowdsourcing could take place depends on the purpose of the crowdsourcing. A key answer was that it should take place was "when it can make a difference and as a step in the wider process.", or "When you have a clear idea of the problem to solve" or "When the people you are asking will know the answer!"

The purpose of the crowdsourcing would determine when in the legislative process it would happen. It would also depend on what the outcome would be. For example, would the law-makers be bound by the wisdom of the crowd, or would this be used simply to inform their decision making? Another participant noted that some people who would want to take part are focused on detail, whereas others care more about the big picture. Therefore participation could work best at different stages for different people.

It could be used for example for the following purposes:

- Content - summarization/categorization
- Consultation
- Visualisation
- Opinion mining
- Topic identification
- Sentiment analysis
- Social media analysis
- Voting

There should be chances to participate locally and have local conversations to make the EU seem like something relevant to localities and not "something that happens in Brussels".

It is key for any citizen involvement that citizens should have information about when and where they can participate. The institutions need to be better at communicating opportunities.

Citizens should be able to engage with their MEPs to lobby them to act on their behalf. Also, citizens should be able to engage with members of their national parliament and the members of the scrutiny committees so that people's views are represented by the UK Parliament in its interactions with the EU and the EU legislative process.

The best time to influence the policy-making process is at the beginning when the policy ideas are first being formulated. This is where citizens should have a chance to input, not in a consultation on legislation that has already been drafted.

One group thought that "crowdsourcing" was the wrong word. This is a much bigger issue and it is about open democracy and open policy-making, engaging citizens in political decision making.

There should be an 'impact analysis' undertaken during the policy-making process. This should outline the range of different choices available and provide information about how each choice would impact different demographics. This would be a very positive use of crowdsourcing as it would aid informed decision making.

Although many people thought ideas should be taken at the start of the legislative process, at the idea generation stage, others thought that it should happen at the final stage of the process, i.e. before decision making or vote by elected representatives; 'if there's no chance to go back after a bill has been read at a certain point then what's the point?' asked one participant.

Some people thought that crowdsourcing should take place at several points in the process, for example e-consultations at the Green paper stage, explanation communication at the White paper stage, crowdsourcing input for amendments and explanations before MPs/MEPs vote on issues and for impact assessment. Other people thought that there is no place for crowdsourcing in the middle of the policy making process because it would serve no useful purpose to comment on a half-complete idea. There was no agreement on this issue.

The first group proposed that crowdsourcing be inserted at selected points during the process because although they thought that people should be involved as much as possible in making the decisions that affect them, they cannot have a direct relationship with the current legislative process. Some people thought that the current process is too rigid to incorporate public participation meaningfully. There were suggestions to 'rewrite the system!' because people thought that it needs to include more decentralization and work cooperatively in order to incorporate meaningful public participation. Public participation and consultation through crowdsourcing was viewed very positively by the participants in this group.

However, the group also noted that as the system currently works, public servants' workload can be overloaded if they receive high volumes of public opinion and participation, so having robust systems in place to handle this type of co-decision is important. Using algorithms to make sense of public contributions makes the system seem untrustworthy, they thought, so people need to be able to demonstrate how they have arrived at conclusions.

A crowdsourcing platform could use open-annotation to discuss legislation/minutes etc which is more transparent and participative.

One of the groups turned the question around and asked:

When should crowdsourcing NOT happen?

- Because you think it will make you look good for doing it
- After decisions have been made, to confirm them. This can leave people feeling disillusioned and ignored. It will hurt, not help the process in the long term.
- Because it is a buzzword, you have heard others use
- For an already finished white paper, or something similar
- When you already have an answer
- When you have run out of options
- There is a problem to be solved around who should be asked. Experts or everyone? How can the information be relied on to be accurate?
- There is no point crowdsourcing ideas from people who have no knowledge of the subject
- The wisdom of the crowd is not necessarily the best option

SECTION 3: EVALUATION OF EVENT

VIII. Extent to which event has increased participant's understanding of the EU

Following the presentation by Daniel Ambrus, participants were more aware of how the legislative process works in the EU. Participants also saw that the UK works together with other countries in the EU to inform policy making.

IX. Extent to which event has improved participants awareness about using crowdsourcing for e-participation in EU policy making-process

Participants left the event with more knowledge about what crowdsourcing is, how the EU legislative process works and what other initiatives are happening in other parts of the EU. They also left with more awareness of the sorts of channels being considered by the EU for e-participation as well as the sorts of challenges to this, for example language barriers and online identification and data protection at the EU level.

Report submitted by Millicent Scott Brooks on 20th March 2017 in London, UK.

Appendix 1

Agenda **Taking control of politics: can digital democracy help?** **Newspeak House, London, UK, 9th February 2017**

13.00 **Arrival, registration**

Please contribute to the ideas wall

13.30 **Introduction**

What is democracy? Informal discussions in groups

What is "crowdsourcing"? Elisa Lironi from the European Citizens' Action Service explains what we mean by this.

International Examples

Four case studies will be presented to showcase examples of citizen engagement in Greece, Latvia, Finland and Scotland.

What can be crowdsourced? Group discussions at tables.

15.00 10 minute break

The European legislative process - Daniel Ambrus from the European Commission representation in the UK will provide an overview of the European legislative process.

When in decision-making process should crowdsourcing happen?

Discussions in groups about when in the process citizens should or could be able to participate.

16.00 10 minute break

How can we take control? If we were to use a tool for crowdsourcing, what features should it have? Are there any platforms that exist that could be good for this purpose?

17.00 **Pizza, meetup & drinks**

Chance to exchange ideas and contribute further to the ideas wall

19.00 **Close of event**

Appendix 2

