

SCIENCE FOR POLICY BRIEFS

Participatory and Deliberative Democracy

Context

- The European Commission is committed to a “new push for European democracy” to “strengthen the links between people, nations and institutions in Europe”.
- As part of this commitment, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) is working to implement participatory and deliberative practices in science and policy, recognising that expert knowledge may not be enough to address citizens’ concerns and complex governance issues.
- The Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy provides the tools, resources, research and methodologies to build capacity and best practice in participatory and deliberative democracy across different levels of governance in the EU.

Strengthening EU Democracy

Democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights are the foundations on which the European Union is based. Democracy is a core European value, and a precondition for EU membership. EU citizens see democracy, human rights and rule of law as the most important EU asset. Democracy depends on giving citizens the opportunity to participate in public life and help shape laws and public policies, not only at election time.

However, like many democracies around the world, democracy in the EU and in its Member States is faced with substantial challenges: a loss of trust in EU institutions, disillusionment among citizens, the rise of extremism, increasing political polarisation, online disinformation and politically manipulated information, and a growing distance between citizens and elected representatives. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought these challenges into relief: the exceptional emergency measures taken to address the health crisis have sparked concerns about the impact on democracy. It has become clearer that **democracy cannot be taken for granted, and our democratic systems need to be actively nurtured and defended.**

Therefore, action to strengthen European democracy is critical to counter these challenges. Research shows that **citizen participation in public decision making can deliver better policies, strengthen democracy, and build trust in institutions.** The European Union is taking action to ‘protect and strengthen our democracy and defend our common European values’. The Conference on the Future of Europe is enabling citizens to discuss their ideas for the future at an unprecedented scale. The European Democracy Action Plan recognises the need to empower citizens between elections by encouraging participatory and deliberative techniques.

At the same time, a **‘Deliberative Wave’ has been taking place in Europe and globally to institute more deliberative forms of policymaking.** This wave has seen a rise in citizens’ assemblies, juries, and panels including La



Convention citoyenne pour le climat in France and The Citizens' Assembly in Ireland.

In this context there is increasing demand from the European Commission, other European institutions and EU organisations for capacity to support participatory and deliberative projects and policies. The new Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy aims to meet this demand by providing concrete support to European Commission initiatives, as well as to the variety of participatory and deliberative activities and projects that have been flourishing throughout Europe recently.

Participatory and Deliberative Democracy

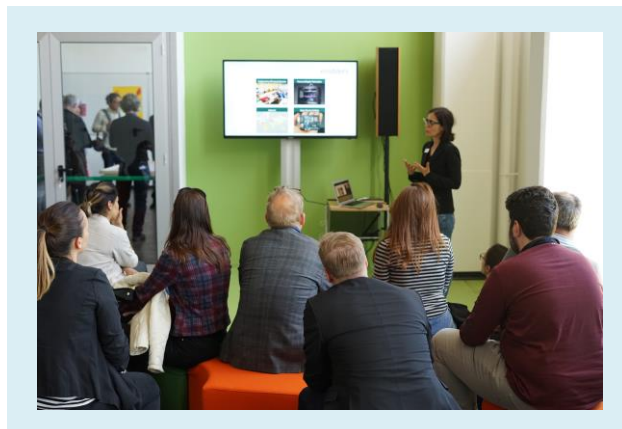
- Participatory democracy is a governance approach that puts emphasis on engaging citizens through co-creation and deliberative practices to help shape laws and public policies.
- Deliberative democracy is a political commitment to collective decision-making where citizens are actively engaged in policymaking and reach agreement through deliberation.
- These practices are about involving citizens in the co-design and co-implementation of policies that are fit-for-purpose: designed, implemented and evaluated with citizens, for citizens.

About the Competence Centre

What we do

The Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy builds capacity on citizen engagement in policy making by providing services, guidance and tools to support the development of socially robust policy through participatory and deliberative practices. The Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy is one of a group of dedicated Joint Research Centre knowledge and competence centres that aim to strengthen the bridge between science and policy. The competence centres are virtual interfaces where policymakers and practitioners can find specialised expertise in cross-cutting research areas.

The Competence Centre is advancing innovation in this area at the citizen-science-policy interface by researching participatory and deliberative methods across different levels of governance. At EU institutional level we are developing the scaffolding to facilitate these processes in-house, with guidance, training, tools and other resources. The Competence Centre will provide the meeting point for policymakers within the Commission and in the Member States who want to connect more deeply with citizens and meet with practitioners to exchange ideas, methodologies and best practice. It is a place to trial new techniques and build new partnerships. By doing so, it will make sure the Commission is able to tap into the best in class practice, resources and partners for its own work and support the mainstreaming of participatory and deliberative democracy in policymaking at national, regional and local level in the EU.



Our objectives are to:

- Enrich the EU knowledge base on participatory and deliberative practices;
- Provide guidance for researchers and policymakers for policy that is fit-for-purpose;
- Build capacity in citizen engagement practices and participatory governance both at EU institution level and in EU countries;
- Implement diverse perspectives in policymaking from practitioners in the field, civil society organisations and citizens;
- Develop and experiment with new methodologies and spaces for citizen engagement;
- Foster our Community of Practice (CoP) on Citizen Engagement and Deliberative Democracy in continuing to share good practices and advance knowledge in the field and build on these insights for high quality participatory governance models in the EU and beyond.

Collaboration

The aim of the Competence Centre is to develop and strengthen partnerships in the field of participatory and deliberative democracy. We welcome ideas for potential collaboration and joint initiatives. If you have questions or queries please get in touch at the email addresses below. You can find more information about our work through our Knowledge for Policy [Competence Centre website](#). In addition, the Citizen Engagement and Deliberative Democracy Community of Practice Website is a live repository to find information on organisations involved in participatory and deliberative democracy and citizen engagement, citizen engagement projects in the EU, and networking activities and opportunities.

Contacts:

EU-CITIZEN-ENGAGEMENT@ec.europa.eu
Angela.Pereira@ec.europa.eu

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