PRESS RELEASE

Brussels – On 26 June 2024, the final event of the EuComMeet project, titled "Just Transition & Participatory Democracy: Lessons Learned from H2020 EuComMeet Project," was held at the European Committee of the Regions. This event marked the culmination of four years of intensive research and experimentation on new forms of deliberative democracy aimed at directly involving citizens in the decision-making process.

"EuComMeet has three goals in mind: bringing deliberative democracy closer to the people, exploring the impact of deliberative democracy on identity, polarization, reflexivity, impact, and inclusion, and exploring ways with which online deliberations can be improved using automated moderation and automated translation," said Professor Pierangelo Isernia, the coordinator and principal investigator of the EuComMeet project.

Project Background and Aims

Conceived before the COVID-19 pandemic but launched in 2021 under the Horizon 2020 program, EuComMeet sought to address the challenges of representative democracies by demonstrating how deliberation can effectively reduce polarization, strengthen European identity, and promote inclusivity. The project was led by a prestigious consortium coordinated by the University of Siena together with the University of Stuttgart, the University of Warsaw, Paris 8 University, Åbo Akademy University, Dublin City University, and CSIC Madrid. In addition to the scientific research, the significant contributions of Missions Publiques, Nethood, Adapt Center, and TOUR4EU, the Association of Tuscan Universities in Brussels, also played a key role as consortium partners.

Technological Innovations and Practical Applications

One of the main innovations of EuComMeet is the Convivium platform, an open-access and scalable tool designed to engage citizens in discussions at local, national, and European levels. The platform features automated moderation and translation technologies, ensuring smooth and effective communication among participants from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Its functionalities and capabilities were shown during the event by the creators of the platform, Mr. Antoniadis and Mr. Secchi, while researchers from the DCU explained how they incorporated automated translation.

During the event, the partners from Missions Publiques also shared insights from a large-scale online deliberative event conducted in May 2023. This event involved nearly 400 European citizens from 10 cities in Italy, Ireland, France, Germany, and Poland, who deliberated on Green Deal topics: sustainable food consumption, plastic pollution, and sustainable mobility. The discussions highlighted how the platform facilitated inclusive dialogue and participatory decisions, overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers. Mr. Paulo Rosa from the Joint Research Centre, on the other hand, showcased the results of deliberative sessions held during the Conference on the Future of Europe.

A Platform for Cities and Beyond

© 2021 EuComMeet – This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No 959234

The event, hosted by the European Committee of the Regions, featured participation from committee members, stakeholders, and researchers from across Europe. Notable speakers included the CoR Member Nadia Pellefigue, Vice President of the Occitanie Region in France, who showcased her Region's innovative solutions in deliberative democracy.

"Since 2016, we have engaged citizens with 55 democratic exercises in the Occitania region, involving no less than 3.5 million people. It is an effort to involve citizens by providing them with the necessary skills and information to actively participate in the decision-making process," said Vice President Pellefigue.

Arianna Censi, Deputy Mayor for Mobility of the Municipality of Milan and a Member of the Committee of the Regions, as well as the event's co-organiser, also emphasised the importance of citizen engagement: "Platforms like those promoted by EuComMeet create the conditions for a competent and genuine participatory process, facilitating a deeper dialogue between institutions and citizens."

Looking Ahead: Expanding Deliberative Practices

The final event emphasised the importance of deliberative practices in enhancing democratic engagement and underscored the potential for broader adoption of such platforms. Ms. Godkin, Member of the Cabinet of Commissioner for Democracy and Demography, applauded the EuComMeet project: "Your project shows that innovation in democracy can be found at all levels of governance. Your multi-level, multi-stage, multi-mode, multilingual, highly dynamic, deliberative approach can inspire our work at the European Union level and in the European Commission."

Ms. Godkin further highlighted the strenuous efforts of the Commission and gave some insights into the next one: "often stemming from grassroots initiatives, citizen engagement processes and participative and deliberative practices have inspired our work in the Conference on the Future of Europe. It's crucial to support democratic innovation as a priority for the future Commission. For example, the recent citizens' panel on artificial intelligence organized by the Belgian presidency provides a model for other member states."

The EuComMeet consortium expressed hope that the project's results and tools will inspire further initiatives aimed at bridging the gap between citizens and policymakers. The positive conclusion of the EuComMeet project represents a significant step toward creating more participatory and deliberative forms of democracy in Europe.

© 2021 EuComMeet – This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No 959234