The Challenges of a Cross-Border Public Participation Process:
Methods used and implementation of the European Citizens' Consultations

Introduction

The European Citizens' Consultations provide the first-ever opportunity for members of the public from all 27 Member States to debate the future of the European Union across the boundaries of geography and language. Citizens reflecting the diversity of the population are randomly chosen to take part in the deliberations, to identify common ground and to make recommendations to policy-makers as they prepare to take decisions on Europe's future.

The consultations create a truly European discussion, bringing citizens together at European events and linking simultaneous national debates on a shared agenda of ideas set by the citizens themselves. They establish a model for European citizens' participation on future topics with an innovative combination of professional facilitation and modern technology.

They are organised by a group of independent organisations led by the King Baudouin Foundation (Belgium) in collaboration with European Citizen Action Service (ECAS), the European Policy Centre (EPC) and the Network of European Foundations (NEF). They are supported by Compagnia di San Paolo, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, Robert Bosch Stiftung and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and, at national level, by another 17 funding organisations. The European Citizens Consultations rally behind them an operating network of civil society organisations from all 27 Member States and with 20 foundations the largest network of foundations ever committed to a civil society project.

Background

The European Citizens' Consultations (ECC) are based on the experiences with the so-called Meeting of Minds project, a pan-European deliberation process among citizens from 9 European countries, including Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands and the United Kingdom. From 2005 to early 2006, they discussed the ethical, social and legal implications of brain science with international experts. They then came up with suggestions (new technology, medicines, techniques) about what should be done with the new found knowledge on the brain. These results are currently being offered to policy-makers at the European, national and transnational level.

The idea was that if citizens from 9 different countries speaking 8 different languages can hold intense debates on an issue as complex as brain science, why should it not be feasible to have citizens from all Member States of the EU discuss about the Future of Europe – in all their respective languages?

A study was therefore conducted that assessed the logistic and financial feasibility of organising debates among citizens beyond the borders of geography and language. The writing of the study fell into the so-called "period of reflection" following the rejections of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in France and the Netherlands in 2005. This pause to contemplate about the future of Europe and to engage into a broad debate across the EU had been prescribed by the European heads of State and Government at the June Summit. Soon after, the Commission's DG Communication came up with Plan D for democracy, dialogue and debate. Within this context, DG Communication issued a call for proposals with the aim to re-connect citizens with the EU. A consortium of partners led by the King Baudouin Foundation formed around the idea of "European Citizens' Consultations" and submitted its proposal to the Commission. As a result, the ECC network was awarded the largest share of the Commission's co-funding budget in 2006.

Process and Methodology

The following is a process chart featuring the key stages or *building blocs* of the of the European Citizens' Consultations project, which was kicked off in October 2006 and came to a provisional end in May 10 with the hand-over of the final results to European policy-makers.
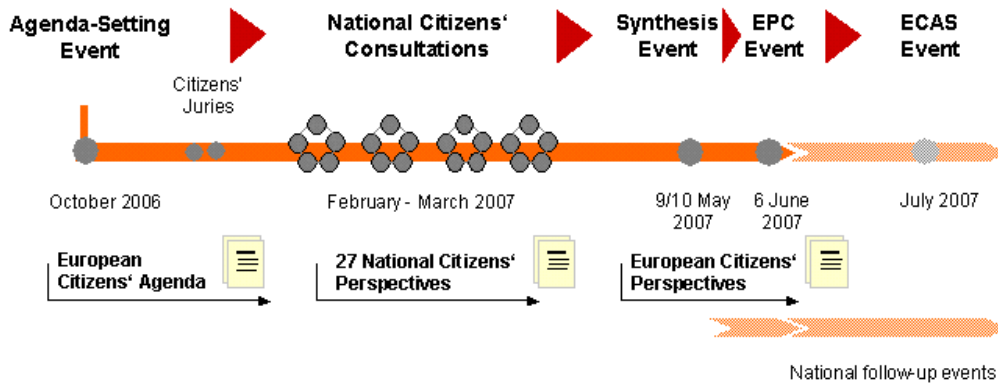
Agenda-Setting Event: the kick-off

On 7/8 October 2006, 200 randomly selected citizens from all EU Member States participated in the Agenda-Setting Event (ASE) in Brussels. They were invited to present their opinions on the influence Europe has had on their lives and to discuss what direction they would like to see Europe take in the future. In identifying common ground on the central question of "what Europe do we want?", they set the agenda for the following national consultations.

No prior knowledge on the EU or its policies was required and each participant could speak his or her native language gathered on 26 bi-lingual tables each supported by a professional table facilitator and an interpreter. In a first step, citizens identified shared topics by exchanging perspectives about the Europe they would like to live in. These were matched against a list of topics that had been identified in a pre-event survey. In a next step, citizens had the opportunity to amend, merge or drop topics. At the end of the first day, citizens selected three topics they found most important for a debate on the future of Europe. During the second day, they worked on enriching these topics so that the three could be refined into:

- Energy & Environment: The environmental and economic impact of Europe's energy use
- Family & Social Welfare: The social and economic conditions for Europe's families
- EU's Global Role & Immigration: The EU's role in the world and the management of immigration

A report was made available to citizens right at the end of the event.

Methods used

To make every voice heard and to channel and focus the citizens' input, an **adaptation of the World Café** method was used: discussions started in small table groups. Subsequently, delegates from the smaller table groups came together at a large central table, which helped them focus their discussions. A small editorial team worked behind the scenes to synthesise and document all the ideas that had been developed at the tables.

In addition, citizens were offered the opportunity to obtain topical information on the issues they discussed. This information was made available in the shape of info-posters, speakers' corners, graffiti spaces for participants' comments etc. All of this happened in a "**Market Place**" setting not unlike the well-known Open Space meetings.

The citizens' discussions were documented using **networked laptop computers**. The stream of information coming from all the tables was centralised and carefully edited by an editing team. The whole process was shown to the plenary on a live screen. This practice ensures that the dialogue is made transparent and moves forward in a continuous flow. Each participant and each group was able to identify common ground, which allowed them to move forward. Once (interim) results had been achieved, citizens were able to vote on them. For this they used **electronic voting pads**.

Citizen Juries / Planning cells: the test groups

The citizens' juries are the second stage of the European Citizens' Juries. Their main purpose was to deepen these topics to prepare further information for the national consultations. They took place in Berlin (4 days in November) and Budapest (3 days in December 2006) with 45 and 40 randomly selected citizens, respectively, and following a common schedule with the same working units.

Method used

Citizens' juries and citizens' reports are tools for the participation of citizens on planning and decision-making processes. They were developed as an interrelated method in the early 1970's at the Research Centre of Citizen's Participation and Methods of Planning at the University of Wuppertal by Prof. Dr. Peter C. Dienel. The preparation of the citizens' jury, the compilation of the program, the selection of the experts and the processing of the results is organised by a neutral and independent organisation. The whole process must be structured and prepared in detail. To assure an unobstructed and successful accomplishment these meetings are usually not open to the public.

Every day was divided in four working units lasting 90 minutes. Between each working unit was a 30 minutes break. Lunch was served between the second and the third working unit. Each working unit was divided in two parts. In the first and shorter part an expert provided basic information on the topic discussed in the particular unit. This took approximately 20-25 minutes. Afterwards the participants had 10 minutes for possible questions. Thereafter the expert left the jury and the participants split into groups consisting of five people which discussed the topic at hand on the basis of a concrete question. This question was handed out to them in the beginning of the working group stage. Citizens had 30-40 minutes time to discuss the topic and to agree upon three important aspects, answering the given question and to write them down on already prepared cards. At the end of the session all participants gathered in the plenum to present the results of each working group. If possible, similar or close results were combined in a cluster. At the end of each working unit every participant received six adhesive stickers to vote for the most important aspects from his or her point of view. The participants were not allowed to put more than two stickers on each card or cluster.

National Consultations: the heart

From February to March 2007, 27 national consultations took place in all Member States of the European Union. They are at the heart of the European Citizens' Consultation project. Based on the results of the Agenda-Setting Event, 30 to 200 randomly selected citizens discussed the three selected topics mentioned above. During two days, five to ten events took place simultaneously according to a shared agenda. The consultations were shaped by a broad consortium of national foundations and non-profit organisations from all over Europe. Each of them followed a common

robust structure and sequence of activities to produce comparable results – the 27 national, i.e. "(Swedish, Estonian…) Citizens' Perspectives on the Future of Europe". Nevertheless, the national partners were able to adapt the schedule to their respective national context.

Methods used

The following table outlines the schedule according to which all national consultations were organised.

	Setting	Activity
Day 1:Morning	Plenary	**Welcome / Introduction** Citizens obtain information on schedule of the day, process as a whole, their role, and the format of expected outcomes.
	Plenary	**Voting** Citizens share demographic data (gender, age, profession etc.) among themselves and across locations
	Table groups	**Generating objectives**: Citizens are split into three groups (one per topic). For each of the 3 topics, all citizens complete the phrase "In 2020, I would like to live in a Europe that…". Their input is recorded on cards and put on a pin board.
Day 1: Afternoon	Table groups	**Grouping objectives**: In each group – for one topic only, citizens try to group or categorise these ideas and to name this category. They thereby condense the variety of ideas to several strong objectives.
	Table groups	**Challenging the objectives**: Resource persons, i.e. experts, join the groups. Citizens try to detect problems or trade-offs regarding their objectives. Experts complete missing challenges.
	Rotation	Citizens visit other groups to learn about the objectives they came up with
	Plenary	**Opinion snapshot** Each citizen is given 15 votes (5 for each of the 3 topics) to express which of these objectives he/she consider most important. This serves as a rough guideline to help citizens focus their subsequent discussions
	Tables groups	**Formulating an achievable vision**: Based on their objectives, trade-offs and the results of the opinion snapshot each group is asked to come up with one achievable vision on the Europe they would like to live in.
Day 2: until early afternoon	Plenary	**Presentation and sharing of results:** Citizen representatives present the vision of their group. They then learn what the groups in the other countries have come up with.
	Table groups	**Role of the EU:** Citizens define whether they see a role of the EU or not in achieving this vision.
	Rotation	**Content Feedback :** Citizens visit other groups and obtain and exchange feedback on the results.
	Table groups	**Editing:** Citizens work the feedback into their results. Last chance for final amendments.
	Plenary	**Confidence Voting:** After being presented the final results, citizens vote to express whether they are satisfied or feel comfortable with these results.
	Plenary	**Feedback-Voting**
	Plenary	**Closing Ceremony / End of National Consultation**

After each event, citizens received the final outcome of their discussions, i.e. the National Citizens' Perspective on the Future of Europe as a print-out. For each of the consultations, the format and structure of this document was the same with static and variable content to make the results comparable across countries: an introduction putting the national consultations within the context of the entire project (static content) adding information on the particularities of the national event itself (variable content). This was followed by the citizens' visions for each of the three topics and their definition of the EU's role in achieving these visions (variable content). The next chapter explained how the results were achieved (static content), following by demographic data on the participants and some impressions, i.e. quotes and pictures (variable). The document was concluded with guidelines on how to stay involved and contact details of the national and European partners (static content).

Synthesis Event: the integration

The 27 national reports served as the basis for a European-level synthesis exercise on the 9th and 10th of May 2007. On day 1, 27 citizens (1 volunteer from each national event), accompanied by their respective national partners, worked on a pre-drafted synthesis report that highlighted the common

ground and the areas of divergence between the national outcomes. As representatives of their country panel, the citizens counter-checked their national results with the draft report and amended and edited as appropriate. At the end of day 1, the "European Citizens' Perspectives on the Future of Europe" were finalised. In the morning of the 10th of May, the document was finally approved and signed by the citizens. Afterwards, the citizens received a briefing for the hand-over ceremony in the afternoon. The hand-over took place within the context of a press conference in the European Parliament and was attended by European policy-makers.

Later in the afternoon, citizens were joined by Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the European Commission, who discussed with them the implications of their results and how they relate to current policy areas and Commission activities in a **European Citizens' Roundtable**. Thus, the citizens' results fed directly into the political process immediately after they had been produced thereby avoiding that the impetus that had evolved over the past months waned.

Methods used

The working language at the event was English as interpretation was financially not feasible. The draft synthesis report was also written in English. It had been drafted, cross- and double-checked by a team consisting of members from different organisations inside the European coordinating board. Each statement of each national report was put down in an excel sheet and checked for similarities with or differences to all other reports. The result was a "matrix" containing all input and clustering similar input. The draft synthesis was structured according to these clusters and composed of the statements made at the national consultations. After each statement a bracket indicated which country panel supported the statement.

Upon arrival, citizens entered a large open space with a plenary area and three corners, each devoted to one of the three topics and equipped with a laptop, screen and pin boards that featured the national results in both the original and English language as well as the English draft synthesis report. Each corner was attended by a facilitator and a note-taker. Each citizen and national partner received a copy of their national report, which they then cross-checked with the draft synthesis to determine whether it included the statement, whether the panel was mentioned in relation to the correct statement, whether the statement reflected what was really said at the national event. Requests for amendments were made with the facilitator and a note-taker who entered it – live on screen – into the draft synthesis. In case of doubt, the lead facilitator was consulted who discussed with the parties involved and mediated were appropriate.

Follow-Up Events: the intensification and continuation

The objective of the follow-up process is to actively communicate the European citizens' perspectives to policy-makers and the wider public. June 6th marks the official beginning of the follow-up process. A small number of selected citizens joins a panel of policy-makers at a policy dialogue organised in cooperation with the European Policy Centre (EPC). The panel members together with the audience and journalists engage into an in-depth discussion about the policy implications of the perspectives. Citizens are able to directly confront the policy-makers with their questions about what will happen to their results. Policy-makers, in turn, can outline in which fields relevant actions are already in place and how they believe the citizens' results can feed into the decision-making process. Both can be questioned and challenged by journalists and the audience in an interactive and facilitated dialogue process. In autumn, ECAS (European Citizen Action Service) organises an event to discuss the way forward for citizen participation and what the EU can learn from the European Citizens' Consultation project.

Various other follow-up events will take up the discussion and further the debate on the Future of Europe in general, and the contents and results of the three topics in particular at national level. These include, among others, 15 citizen fora that are currently running in Germany, policy debates in Belgium, conferences in Sweden, presentations in national parliaments in Slovenia and Denmark etc.

Methods used

The methods used, for example, for the German citizens' fora corresponds to those applied to the national consultations. The structure and implementation of national follow-up events is under the full responsibility of the national partners and does not follow a pre-determined design.

Implementation of a pan-European participatory project

Implementing a truly pan-European dialogue project requires an enormous effort in mobilising both human and financial resources. The European Citizens' Consultations (ECC) aimed at overcoming shortcomings of previous and present dialogue initiatives by improving well-known formats and adding innovative elements to them. In particular, the ECC project defined for itself the following requirements:

Frequent shortcomings of existing dialogue initiatives	Requirements for ECC
narrow scope, self-selected participants	broad scope, randomly selected participants
little cross-national exchange	systematic cross-linking and integration of national debates
participants primarily listeners and receivers of information	participants at the centre of the dialogue
little or no follow-up	accountable and transparent follow-up and active policy integration

Four organisational elements will be dealt with here in more detail that proved to be crucial for the implementation of the European Citizens' Consultations: partner management, recruitment, simultaneousness/integration of events, media & outreach.

Partner Management

The DG Commission's call for proposals stipulated that the project must involve "the candidate organisation and a minimum of several other partner organisations. These must each be established in a different EU Member State". The first challenges was therefore to get together a core consortium of partners. This then extended into a network of operation and funding partners that, today, spans over the entire EU and comprises 31 operational partners and more than 20 foundations (see last page). Such a network translates into a considerable management and coordination effort.

Trainings

4-6 weeks prior to each event, the partners of a group of simultaneous events participated in a preparatory training session. There, they became acquainted with the schedule and the methods used at the national consultations and were able to ask questions. They were also informed about reporting and budgeting requirements set out by the European Commission and the King Baudouin Foundation. The documents used for the events (powerpoint presentation to lead through the event, roles & responsibilities of partners and their staff, badges etc.) were made available in a partner forum. Regular **telephone conferences** were scheduled for each group and partners were encouraged to contact the central European coordination team for additional questions.

Coordination

The trainings and telephone conferences were key to the efficient coordination of activities. In addition, an online partner forum was set up. The **forum** was used to answer frequently asked questions about the national consultations, disseminate documents and support material (templates for national reports, badges, reimbursement sheets etc.), exchange ideas (for evening events, decoration,

process) and to learn about other ongoing activities at European and national levels (process/project description, political agenda etc.).

Screenshot of ECC Forum (general structure)

Budget

The total cost of the project, including the 27 national events, two European events, and a follow-up process was around € 3 million. More than 30% of this money was provided by European independent foundations. The European Commission has awarded the project a grant within the framework of Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate.

Recruitment

In all, more than 1,800 citizens from all Member States of the European Union participated in the core elements of the project (exclusive follow-up events). They were selected randomly according to a pre-determined set of selection criteria including gender, age and socio-economic background. Further criteria were added as appropriate in each country (e.g. regional diversity, minorities, etc.). As a result, the citizens came from all walks of life and reflected the diversity of their countries' population and thereby of the entire European Union.

The partners chose whether they favoured a "European" or "national" solution for the recruitment, meaning that either a European-wide acting opinion research agency recruited the citizens or national organisations, including universities, market/opinion research agencies. Consistency was enforced through the application of common selection criteria.

For the synthesis event, citizens from each of the national consultations volunteered. The partners then checked whether their English was sufficient to participate actively in the event. If there were more applicants then they were chosen by the European coordination team to ensure a good mix of gender, age etc.

Simultaneousness of events

The following national events happened simultaneously:

Group 1 (10/11 Feb 07)	Group 2 (24/25 Feb)	Group 3 (10/11 Mar)	Group 4 (24/25 Mar)
CZ, EE, SI, IE, BU	LV, SK, HU, BE, DE	DK, GR, PL, NL, LU, FR, PT	**4a)** SE, IT, UK, ML, RO
			4b) AT, LI, FI, ES, CY

Simultaneous events started at the same time (taking into account different time zones) and following a common agenda. This agenda foresaw different **integration points**. These integration points were used to exchange data and to keep the process in sync. One of these integration points was, for instance, the sharing of demographic data at 12:00am. The data was obtained individually in each country and shared by a **European coordinator** (a member of the central European coordination team present in the country) through the ECC forum. The other integration points were the sharing of interim results (drafts of the EU vision, impressions, quotes) in the morning of the second day and the exchange of voting results from the confidence and feedback vote (in the afternoon of day 2). Also a "live" element was implemented, were citizens were able to receive live impressions from the other countries through **Skype** connection. Citizens actually saw their fellows discuss in other countries and knew that their debates had relevance beyond their national boundaries. A European dialogue and a European feeling was created.

Sharing of demographic data
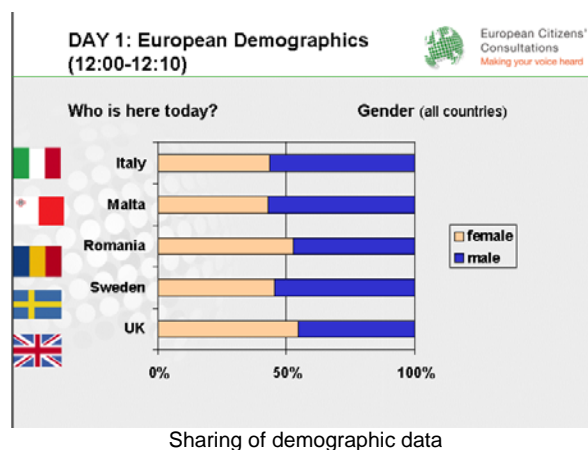
Media and outreach

Each European event (Agenda-Setting and Synthesis Event) was preceded and followed by a press release that was fed into the "European media" and the Brussels network by both a media/PR expert and through the communication channels of a civil society organisation. The press release contained information on the project and the stage of the process as well as an invitation to media and observers to attend the event.

For the national events, the partners were urged to engage at an early stage into media activities, to send out press releases and invitations to "VIPs" and the media. The consultations attracted the attention of Heads of State, members of European and national parliaments, ambassadors and researchers who attended the events, spoke with citizens and examined their results. In all countries, the media reported about the events, either through TV, radio, newspapers or the internet.

Media support was crucial to deliver and disseminate the results of discussions, to enable cross-border comparisons of a large variety of opinions, to scale the outreach of the message and to deliver and even stronger policy impact.

Even after the Synthesis Event, media activities are ongoing. National partners organise follow-up events that are covered by media. Two European events take place in June and autumn respectively inviting European policy-makers, journalists, stakeholders and the wider public to carry on with the debate.

The ECC all over Europe

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