



# Europeans have a Say

## Online Debates and Consultations in the EU

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**Preface** This report provides an assessment of the EU's online initiative *Your Voice in Europe* (<http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice>) offering *online debates* and *online consultations* on European issues. The major objective of this study is to investigate how deliberation takes place on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform. It involves reflections on deliberation providing the theoretical background for a content analysis on *online debates* and for qualitative expert interviews on *online consultations*. Against the background of these results, the study also attempts to analyse in a scenario workshop with Austrian experts how online participation in political issues might be designed in Austria in the year 2025.

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Project Management and Administration:

›node‹-Project meetings/visits (internal)

Title	Data and Place	Objectives
Kick off meeting (Roman Winkler and Ulrike Kozeluh)	July 1, 2003, Vienna	In depth meeting covering organisational matters and content issues
Research Seminar with Prof. Michaela Strasser (Project Partner, Univ. of Salzburg)	August 11, 2003, Salzburg	Quality assurance concerning theory report (WP 2)
ITA Seminar	October 7, 2003 and September 15, 2004, Vienna	Project Presentation
Research Seminar with Prof. Stephen Coleman (Project Partner, Oxford Internet Institute)	November 5, 2003, Oxford, UK	Quality assurance concerning theory report (WP 2)
Project meeting with ›node‹ team dealing with “Zur politischen Rolle und Bedeutung von ATTAC im Kontext der Europäischen Zivilgesellschaft” (Prof. Alan Scott)	March 22, 2004, Vienna	Presentation of ›node‹ projects; searching for overlaps and synergies for workshops, publications and intended project proposals within further ›node‹ calls.
Project meeting with ›node‹ team dealing with “How Democratic is E-Government? Public Knowledge Management and Governmentality in Europe” (Dr. Fritz Betz)	March 26-27, 2004, Vienna	Presentation of ›node‹ projects; searching for overlaps and synergies for workshops, publications and intended project proposals within further ›node‹ calls.

Conferences and/or workshops  
attended/organised

Title	Data and Place	Titel of Presentation
Informatik Tagung 2003, Workshop: "e-Democracy"	October 2, 2003, Frankfurt a. Main	Online Debatten und Konsultationen in der Europäischen Union
ICA/IAMCR Conference: "Digital Dynamics"	November 7, 2003, Loughborough, UK	The changing role of electronic deliberation
"AGORA" Demokratieforschung	November 10, 2003, Vienna	Project Presentation
Lecture at the Donau Universität Krems, MSc Programme "eGovernment" (Roman Winkler)	April 22, 2004, Krems, Austria	Elektronische Demokratie in Theorie und Entwicklung
AGORA-Demokratieforschung – Roundtable (Ulrike Kozeluh)	March 1; April 19; May 17; June 14, 2004; September 6; October 11; November 29 2004 and January 11, 2005, Vienna	Ongoing Presentation and Discussion on node project
"Connex Network" Kick-off conference on "Connecting Excellence on European Governance" (Ulrike Kozeluh)	September 10-12, 2004, Mannheim	Presentation of node project results within Research Group 4: "EU-Society Relations and the Formation of a Multi-Intermediary Political Space"
Meeting, 6th Framework Programme, IST Project, "Intelcities" (Ulrike Kozeluh)	October 20-22, 2003, Vilnius, Lithuania	Presentation of node project results within Workpackage 5: "Debating E-Democracy as a tool for sustainable e-cities regeneration."
10. Kommunikationswissenschaftliche Tage "Medialer Wandel und Europäische Öffentlichkeit" (Roman Winkler and Günther Brandstetter)	November 12, 2004, Vienna	Presentation on "Europäisierung von Öffentlichkeit durch Online Debatten"
NTA1 Konferenz "Technik in einer fragilen Welt" (Roman Winkler)	November 25-26, 2004, Berlin	Presentation on "Neue Medien als demokratiefördernde Plattformen: Online Deliberation auf dem Prüfstand"
Meeting, 6th Framework Programme, IST Project, "Intelcities" (Ulrike Kozeluh)	December 14-15, 2004, Valencia	Presentation of an E-democracy ontology
Scenario Workshop "e-Demokratie in Österreich" (Roman Winkler and Ulrike Kozeluh in cooperation with PlanSinn)	December 10, 2004, Vienna	node Scenario Workshop with 11 invited experts from academia, public chambers and politics.

Publications

Date and Type	Details
September 2003, article in ITA-Newsletter	Winkler, Roman, Elektronische Demokratie: Online Debatten und Konsultationen in der EU, 2003, S. 6-7.
2003, book article	Winkler, Roman, Aichholzer, Georg, 2003, Elektronische Demokratie: Online Debatten und Konsultationen in der Europäischen Union. In: Dittrich, K. et al. (Hg.) Informatik 2003. Innovative Informatikanwendungen. Band 2. Bonn: Köllen, S. 256-260.
2003, book article	Winkler, Roman, 2003, E-Democracy: Potentials and Constraints of Online Participation in the Political Public Sphere. In: Prosser, A., Krimmer, R. (Hg.) E-Democracy: Technologie, Recht und Politik, Wien: OCG, S. 5-14.
September 2004, article in ITA-Newsletter	Winkler, Roman, Wer redet mit? Diskursqualität in EU Online Debatten, 2004, S. 3-4.
December 2004, article in ITA-Newsletter	Winkler, Roman, EU Online Konsultationen. Erfahrungen, Erfolgsfaktoren und Hemmnisse, 2004, S. 3.
Forthcoming: Spring 2005, book article	Winkler, Roman / Kozeluh, Ulrike, Zivilgesellschaft Online: Anspruch und Umsetzung deliberativer Beteiligung am Beispiel der EU Diskussionsplattform Your Voice in Europe. In: Knodt, Michèle und Barbara Finke (Hg.): Europäische Zivilgesellschaft. Konzepte, Akteure, Strategien. Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 2005. (Working Title)
Forthcoming: Spring 2005, book article	Kozeluh, Ulrike, A Theoretical Background for Online-Participation. Encyclopedia of Developing Regional Communities with Information and Communication Technology. Information Science Publishing, Australia
Forthcoming: Summer 2005, book article	Winkler, Roman / Kozeluh, Ulrike / Brandstetter, Günther: Europäisierung von Öffentlichkeit durch Online Debatten und Online Konsultationen. In: Langenbacher, W., Latzer, M. (Hg.), Medialer Wandel und Europäische Öffentlichkeit, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
Forthcoming: Spring 2005, book article	Winkler, Roman: Neue Medien als demokratiefördernde Plattformen: Online Deliberation auf dem Prüfstand. In: NTA1 Konferenzband „Technik in einer fragilen Welt“.

Press coverage

Date and Type	Details
30 July 2004, radio report Ö1 "Wissen Aktuell"	Title: Bürgerbeteiligung mittels Internet
18 October 2004, media report in <i>Der Standard</i>	Title: Am Boden der Tatsachen bleiben: Was E-Democracy wirklich kann
13 December 2004, media report in <i>Der Standard</i>	Titel: Ein kleiner Zirkel von Experten
February 2005 (to be planned), media report in <i>Der Standard</i>	Report on results on "NODE" Scenario Workshop "e-Demokratie in Österreich"

Extended Summary

In 2001, the European Commission set up the *Your Voice in Europe* (<http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice>) online platform targeting the involvement of citizens, NGOs and businesses in European policy-making processes. The platform is part of the Commission's Interactive Policy-Making (IPM) initiative which is mainly influenced by the White Paper on *Good Governance*. Initially, the IPM initiative intended to establish a common Internet communication platform for small and medium-sized enterprises. Consequently, the Commission extended the initiative and considered the involvement of civil society networks and non-parliamentarian actors as crucial for the future policy-making of the European Union (EU). The White Paper describes the need to open up European institutions to the broader public to overcome "political apathy" towards the EU and to improve relationships between EU institutions and the European peoples. In this context, new media are considered to represent helpful and valuable tools given their inherent interactive potential to create dynamic networks which surmount time and space constraints. *Your Voice in Europe* attempts to make full use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) by offering *online debates* and *online consultations* on European issues. While the thematic focus of the former is the "Future of Europe", the latter invites citizens, NGOs and entrepreneurs to express their views and opinions on different policy fields relevant for the Union. Interaction on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform among societal players intends to complement respectively revalue the traditional policy-making instruments (such as "offline" consultations, focus groups discussions etc.) of the EU. Certainly, the characteristics of ICTs (interactivity, unconstrained information and communication flows etc.) appear to offer hitherto unknown options to revive the European political public sphere. However, the central question related to a participation platform such as *Your Voice in Europe* is: How do people use *online debates* and how do they assess the impact of their contributions in *online consultations*? Since the Commission's intentions formulated in several policy-documents strongly promote deliberative communication, this study is based upon the following major research question: "To what extent does the *Your Voice in Europe* platform enable civic deliberation?" Thus, deliberation is the theoretical focus and provides the background for empirical analyses on *online debates* and *online consultations*.

Based upon the research question guiding this project report the following chapters have been set up and frame the theoretical and empirical approaches of this study. *Chapter 1* and *2* deal with the problem background informing this study and involve

some basic reflections about the role of ICTs for democratic processes. *Chapter 3* deals with more general assumptions and problems related to debates on democratic paradoxes, democratic representation and inclusion, and the role of the individual within democratic societies. Furthermore, it provides the grounds for a more detailed discussion on deliberation and its related core ideas and links to major schools of political thought. Consequently, *Chapter 4* describes the significance of deliberative communication for democracy, decisive components of deliberation, the view of deliberation in gender-focused conceptions of democracy and discusses citizenship concepts framing deliberative communication. *Chapter 5* relates these various foci of deliberation to new media and attempts to embed deliberation in models of digital democracy. *Chapter 6* links the theoretical reflections on political deliberation to the empirical assessments on *Online Debates (Chapter 7)* and *Online Consultations (Chapter 8)* and provides a more detailed discussion on the EU's concept of *Good Governance*. *Chapter 9* represents the results gained in a scenario workshop with Austrian experts in online participation. Against the backdrop of the analyses related to the EU level, the workshop results describe experts' views on how digital democracy might be designed in Austria in the year 2025. In the following, we will briefly recapitulate what we have accomplished in this project.

Scholars from various disciplines have discussed the roots of contemporary political apathy on the level of nation states and also on supranational levels (e.g. the EU). The disconnection of the citizenry from the political public sphere is widely considered as a major indicator for political indifference which becomes visible (inter alia) in low voter turnouts. In fact, democracy appears to be in crisis and political institutions and representatives increasingly run the risk to lack political legitimacy. Jürgen Habermas' description of the "refeudalisation" of the political public sphere delivers one of the most prominent theoretical explanations for such developments. Accordingly, political elites and the mass media have become the central players in political life. Citizens have turned into "mere" spectators whose major task is to provide political legitimacy by voting on pre-defined options. Obviously, voting is not enough to maintain a democratic system and to foster relationships between citizens and political representatives, though. Democracy rather necessitates constant discursive interaction in order to achieve commonly accepted decisions and to establish robust relationships in society. Deliberative communication is supposed to contribute to more vivid and "healthy" participation processes. Basically, it is defined as reflection or thinking through an issue. Deliberation comprises the process which takes place before a decision is taken and it is perceived to be important since it directly (re)integrates citizens into the political decision-forming and -making processes. Its significance mainly derives from the assumption that deliberative processes positively impact on the involved actors. Accordingly, discursive interaction on a critical-rational basis triggers learning effects among the participants and contributes to balanced views on problems of a common concern. In this context, rationality is a major requirement of deliberative discussions which are defined as not interested, disguised or manipulated. Rationality involves "good" cognitive reasons which enable people to solve problems of a common concern through social interaction. The Internet is perceived to provide an appropriate space for unconstrained, deliberative discussions and in fact, there is plenty of "Internet talk". However, various scholars describe these dis-

ussions platforms as virtual spaces involving a lot of uncivilised talks which are dominated by individual interests that do not focus on issues of a common concern. Our empirical assessments on the *online debates* and *online consultations* were guided by the overall research question and the following four hypotheses based on Coleman's (2004) assumptions on online participation:

- Most *online discussion* is uninformed and of poor quality.
- *Online consultations* provide a space for inclusive public deliberation.
- *Online consultations* generate and connect networks of interest or practice.
- *Online interaction* between representatives and represented leads to greater trust between them.

The empirical investigations on *online debates* and *online consultations* on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform revealed the following findings:

The content analysis (*Chapter 7*) investigated the democratic potential of *online debates* and discussed interaction patterns and the discourse quality on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform. Against the backdrop of theoretical concepts of deliberation, *interactivity* and *rationality* were identified as the core categories of a content analysis which was based upon a stratified random sample of about 600 discussion postings composed by 225 posters. The descriptive variables (topic; date; length of the posting; name of the poster; language) revealed that about 95 % of the messages were written in English. Interestingly, the length of the messages did not have significant impacts on the discourse quality, i.e. short messages (about a quarter page) were not less rational or balanced in their argumentations than larger contributions (about one page). Basically, the analysed postings can be divided in two groups: The first group of contributions stemmed from a rather small group of posters (Poster Group I: 25 persons). About a tenth of these discussants provided half of all analysed messages. The other group involved a relatively high number of posters (Poster Group II: 200 persons). With regard to the analytical variable *interactivity*, the results show that discussions involved well-developed interactions which were mainly undertaken in small person groups and Poster Group I provided most replies to one precedent message (nearly 80 %). However, Poster Group II used to reply to more than one precedent message which indicates that these discussants were less focused on one particular opinion or view of another discussion fellow. With regard to the message purpose the content analysis shows that the majority of the contributions (75 %) intended to provide information to others and involved personal opinions of posters. "Direct" interaction with other discussants was sought by nearly a quarter of the posters. Those attempted to establish personal discussions with particular posters by approaching them directly via a question or comment. Again, the smaller and more active group (I) involved more direct interactions than the larger Poster Group (II). Regarding the level of agreement within the postings, about 60 % of the online messages were coded as neutral i.e. posters did not clearly express their agreement or disagreement with precedent discussion contributions. With regard to the analysis of the second core category, *rationality*, the assessment shows that about two third of postings included well-formulated and rational arguments whereas the smaller and more active group (I) put forward more rational arguments than the larger group (II)

(68 % vs. 64 %). Very “well-balanced” arguments could be found in nearly a third of the postings, i.e. discussants took into account different views on topics in their messages. The postings also show that a high number of discussants were aware of political and socio-economic institutions and processes: Almost half of the analysed messages indicate that posters showed a broad understanding of political and socio-economic mechanisms in society. The discussions on “The Debate on the European Constitution” and “The European Convention” did not involve many “hard facts”. Figures, historical facts or press statements were used in only 28 % of the messages. The posters also avoided an emotional and ironic tone in most of their messages. Only a fifth of the postings involved emotional aspects and ironic components could be found in only 14 % of the messages. Thus, online discussions were mainly characterised by highly rational communication processes. To sum up, the proposed discussion topics indicate that the participants represent an “expert audience” which does not only debate on profound EU questions (e.g. language dominance in the EU) but also on “hot” issues such as Turkey’s potential accession to the Union. However, these high-level discussion circles may also restrict the openness and accessibility of the discussion platform and exclude other citizens from the debates. The question on the added-value of these online discussions for the individual citizen remains open and would be an adequate starting point for further research in this field. With regard to the general questions on the qualitative determinants of democracy, the motivation of the participants to take part in these *online debates* would be another interesting point of analysis. To conclude on the first hypothesis we hold that online discussions on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform involve well-elaborated interaction patterns and a relatively high discourse quality which indicates vivid deliberative communication processes.

The expert interviews on *online consultations* (Chapter 8) were guided by Macintosh’s (2002) key dimensions to estimate the participative level of *online consultations* and the potential of a participative quality those consultations offer. With regard to OECD’s categorisation of participation levels, EU *online consultations* can be described as tools for informed, needs-based policy-making. The EU *online consultations* do not fulfil the requirements of active participation since there is rarely a response provided and it is not possible to follow the ways the own contribution takes. Regarding Macintosh’s extended classification of participation levels, the *Your Voice in Europe* initiative mainly serves the function of “e-enabling” and “e-engaging” since the consultation of a wider audience leads to feedback recommendations for policy-making procedures. The EU *online consultations* are planned to provide an early input for further decision-making but there is no legally binding structure to use them. This offer of commenting on policy drafts is considered as part of the Commission’s reform of governance strategy. For the assessment, six experts were chosen as interview partners due to their professional backgrounds and expertise in the field of *online consultations*. All interviewed experts agreed that *online consultations* cannot replace the classical political techniques of lobbying, which all interviewees considered central to their intensive co-operations with different institutional levels within the Commission as with relevant intermediaries. What seems to be necessary to use *online consultations* more effectively is a systematic methodology for interpretation and presentation of results. This applies for the structured and free text sections in *online consultation* surveys. However, this also requires further financial and staff resources. Some experts also

questioned the representativity of consultations, which depends on the extent of accessibility. A main point of critique was also the missing official explanation how the responsible unit will use the consultation results. It is not transparent at all, which contributions are taken into consideration for further policy-making and which ones are excluded and for what reasons. Transparency concerning this point could lead to a better usage and a higher degree of participation. As a criterion for increasing the quality of democracy, some experts pointed out, that the Commission should be ready to accept alternative views (contributions) as a basis for further policy-making. Otherwise the consultations would represent a “consensus manufacture”. Furthermore, *online consultations* should not bypass institutionalised instruments of representative decision-making, but there should be more thought on how to link additional participation possibilities and their results to a legitimised framework. With regard to our guiding hypotheses, the empirical investigation leads to the conclusions that

- *Online consultations do not provide a space for inclusive public deliberation in a strong sense, since access depends on being already involved in the consultation topic, to belong to interest networks or to be invited to take part. Experts criticise that there is not enough promotion on (ongoing or intended) online consultations. The consultations are also more relevant for public bodies, NGOs and other institutional players than for the single citizen.*
- *Online consultations can generate and connect networks of interest or practice, if those taking part are regularly invited for further expert focus groups or panel discussions etc.*
- *Online interaction between representatives and represented leads to greater trust between them. This depends if the responsible unit puts more light on the results of a consultation: Who took part? What were the selection criteria? Which recommendations were provided by the contributors? Which methodological approach was used for the interpretation of the results and what is the policy-outcome?*

Based on the results achieved in the content analysis on *online debates* and the qualitative expert interviews on *online consultations*, a scenario workshop with 11 Austrian experts active in the field of online participation (Title: “e-Demokratie in Österreich im Jahr 2025”) was initiated by the >node< project team to assess the significance of online participation in Austria in the year 2025. The main objective was to develop long-term visions of circumstances and requirements appearing to be essential for innovative online deliberation processes in Austria. This scenario workshop had an important function in the process of developing future-oriented online participation. It analysed current experiences in online deliberation at the EU level, framed the development of desirable online applications in Austria in the future and identified those barriers that may hinder the full development of digital democracy in Austria. At the same time, the scenario workshop was one element of our project that directly reflects a major objective of the >node< work programme which encourages “[...] to come up with options and alternatives for the further development of democratic politics”.<sup>1</sup> Against the backdrop of three short scenarios involving problems of a common concern on the national, regional and local level, the workshop group was asked to identify core requirements which support desirable e-democracy applications in Austria. Accordingly, experts put forward the

<sup>1</sup> See NODE Mission Statement, <http://www.node-research.at/englisch/index.php>, accessed 22 April 2004.

following measures that have to be taken into account in order to arrive at a “robust” e-democracy in Austria. These measures can be subsumed under three different levels:

On the *political and administrative level*:

- Democracy needs time: Citizens have to be enabled to deliberate on public problems at length and should not be forced to make “instant votes”.
- Full access has to be granted to publicly relevant information. “Daily politics” and public administrations have to reduce hierarchical hurdles in order to arrive at a more vivid political life in Austria.
- Political representatives have to become more interested in direct interaction with “lay people”. Modes of representative and participatory democracy have to be bridged.
- In order to ensure constant democratic developments and to avoid frustration among the participants in case of unsuccessful decision-forming and -making processes, “exit strategies” have to be provided such as additional (face-to-face) focus groups.
- Online information has to be balanced i.e. different (political) views, opinions and values have to be contrasted to enable citizens to choose among a broad variety of political options.

On the *technological level*:

- Identification systems (such as biometrics) need to be controllable and ensure highest security levels for citizens.

On the *educational level*:

- Accompanying measures related to media pedagogics have to be provided in order to enable all kinds of citizens (the youth, the elderly etc.) to become politically engaged.
- The youth has to be trained in deliberation, i.e. young people have to be provided an open discussion culture which enables the development of discussion and reflection skills. Educational institutions have to implement a non-hierarchical information and communication culture.

Interestingly, the final discussion session in the scenario workshop also showed that apart from the necessity that politicians are prepared and committed to involve citizens in political decision-forming and -making processes, most workshop experts agreed that media pedagogical measures are among the most important ones if e-democracy is supposed to play a key role in Austrian politics in the year 2025. Furthermore, most discussants stressed the significance of new media for the political involvement of citizens at the local level. The manageable size of participants (relatively small communities) and the direct concernment by local problems were regarded as important determinants for successful e-democracy applications that focus on decision-forming and -making processes.

The scenario workshop provided valuable results pertinent for policy-makers who intend to involve citizens and NGOs in decision-forming and -making processes. As a further result, we offer some basic recommendations for policy-makers for the draft, implementation and evaluation of online participation forms. Additionally,

these recommendations are based upon our theoretical reflections on deliberation, our empirical investigations on *online debates* and online consultations and the scenario workshop. To this end, we hold that the following basic dimensions should be considered when policy-makers intend to open up democratic participation:

*Reflection on political motivation:* Policy-makers should be aware of their basic intentions to offer online participation for political purposes. The involvement of citizens and other societal players in decision-forming and -making processes may trigger expectations in the public which must not be disappointed. Thus, decision-forming and -making processes which are supported or exclusively conducted via new media should be framed and accompanied by the following questions:

- What is the main purpose of citizens' involvement in online participation processes?
- What is the added-value of an online participation process in contrast to offline participation (e.g. consensus groups; expert group discussions; referenda etc.)?
- What exactly is expected to be increased or improved by new media? The relationship between the "governors" and the "governed"? The efficiency of policy-making processes? The legitimacy of decisions? ... ?

*Reflection on "clashing views and opinions":* In order to avoid political apathy and dissatisfaction, democracy needs diverging opinions which are commonly respected. Online platforms involve such pluralist views on issues of common concern and consensus achievement does not have to be the ultimate goal of an online decision-forming process. Thus, ICTs can never be a better tool to create consensus but rather make visible a wide range of political visions. However, policy-makers should be able to offer and explain "exit" or alternative strategies in case of conflict situations lacking a common agreement on a decision.

*Reflection on political transparency:* Online participation requires transparency for those who are invited to participate concerning

- Relevance and reasoning of the online participation process for policy-making;
- Relevance and reasoning of the use of participants' online input (e.g. online contributions in debates or consultations);
- Relevance and reasoning of the results of online deliberative processes.

*Awareness of access barriers:* Access to the political stage is still exclusive. Generally, participation in political decision-forming and -making processes depends on connections to relevant networks. Besides, online participation necessitates certain media literacy skills which may be an additional participation barrier. However, policy-makers have to become aware that lay people (such as doctors, nurses, teachers, white and blue collar workers and so forth) have a lot of knowledge which is useful and valuable for policy-making processes. New media offer the option to collect and analyse such societal potentials. However, organisational and technical access barriers have to be reduced. The political public sphere has to be extended by

- firstly, acknowledging that citizens are capable and willing to provide political input,
- secondly, reducing hierarchical barriers to the political public sphere,
- thirdly, creating public online terminals to involve those who do not have access to ICTs.

*Reflection on appropriate use of new media for political participation:* Various participation modes (from aggregative to deliberative) require different tools according to the policy-making circle, i.e. policy-makers have to decide at first if they want to use ICTs for problem definition or decision-making processes. This determines if new media are used for online deliberation or online voting. Certainly, an “ideal” participation process would involve both participation options: In such process online deliberation (e.g. *online debates* or online discussions) would be accompanied by (offline) face-to-face discussions between citizens, NGOs, entrepreneurs and experts. Consequently, all involved actors would be enabled to cast their preferences online. Moreover, policy-makers should be aware that given different governmental layers in society (supra-national, national, regional, local), online participation options have to be selected carefully.

*Reflection on political commitment and trust:* In order to enhance political participation, the moral duty to use results of online deliberation processes has to become ensured. Or, to put it in other words, there has to be a strong political will to consider citizens’ inputs in policy-making processes. Otherwise, (online and offline) participation remains an illusion and fosters demotivation and political apathy. In this context, respect is core to participative processes and includes respect in terms of the duration of a deliberative process and the outcome. There has to be an agreement on time, thematic focus and expectations.

To sum up, we hold that online participation does not and cannot replace other techniques of policy-making but involves the potential to enhance them and may increase the quality of a policy-making process provided.

- There is unconstrained access to policy-making processes,
- citizens have the necessary media literacy skills,
- the participation processes are transparent in terms of the evaluation of participation results and
- political representatives are committed to respect the outcome of online deliberation processes.