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EUROPEAN TECHNOLOGY FORUM 4 SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY

**PANEL 3 – PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY, TECHNOLOGY & COLLECTIVE
INTELLIGENCE – Which framework for Cities & Citizens?**

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SUMMARY

The panel engaged lively and interesting discussions with **Arnau Monterde**, Coordinator of Decidim Project, Director of Democratic Innovation Culture, Education, Science & Community within the *Barcelona City Council*, **Loris Spina**, Alderman, Responsible for citizen participation in *Dudelange City* (Luxembourg), **Julie de Pimodan**, Co-founder & CEO *Fluicity*, Co-founder & President *ACTE* (Association Civic Tech Europe), Dr Raphael Kies, Research Scientist, *PLDP - Luxembourg Platform for Participatory Democracy*, University of Luxembourg. Moderated by **Dr Soledad Gattoni**, Independent Policy Consultant, the panel focused on civic engagement and participation in the context of Cities and the bridges built with citizens.

The moderator gave the floor to the guests, asking what challenges and opportunities gave birth to their different experiences of citizen engagement and how civic engagement was facilitated. All the panelists reported experiences of participatory democracy and underlined main aspects important for constructing democratic and participatory projects.

Julie de Pimodan emphasized the collection of needs, of reactions and the implementation phase regarding the Fluicity platform. Either a combination of them or the focus on one of those is possible. Arnau Monterde explained the democratic project based in Barcelona and reported this flexible, secure, and transparent system is aimed to create a democratic culture through citizens knowledge and contributions, but challenges should not be underestimated: misinformation, importance of a digital secure and safe space, avoidance of inequalities, role of technology in citizens empowerment and enhancement of democratic participation.

Dr Raphael Kies made a distinguishment between local and transnational participatory process: local have advantages in terms of concrete projects feasibility, while the latter has rather more complications concerning the different languages and cultures beyond borders. Technology is important but in so far as it respond both to citizens' demands and administration needs. Loris Spina shared the experience of Dudelange, which is a local example with multicultural peculiarities: inhabitants belong to more than 100 different nationalities.

Attendance of different citizens makes the process more difficult but citizens council – made up of randomly selected citizens - make the population closer to administration and the process is then more transparent. Other important pillars of this experience are the previous phases of communication and the subsequent steps of discussion, vote, development of the project, measurement of results.

Then the talk moved to tackle the aspects, which can be improved in the best practices of each expert. The moderator asked the panelist if there is one lesson we can learn from those experiences. Arnau Monderde listed two main issues: first, more investments in communication, social inclusion, training are necessary to make people participate and to avoid differentiated channels of accessibility; secondly, consultation without accountability and responsiveness is ineffective. Political commitment is then an important requirement for the functioning of a democratic process accessible and for more different people.

Dr Raphael Kies claims that it is difficult to get citizens involved and in a deliberative way. Political courage is necessary to begin a participatory process where specific needs and proposals by citizens are unknown. Loris Spina underlined that communication and ongoing updating of citizens it's important because mere involvement in primary phases of the process it's not sufficient. Updates and progressive adjournments about projects' implementation are what usually citizens are more interested in. Julie de Pimodan's contribution concerned finally the importance of technology, which is crucial both helping citizens to participate easily and supporting the administration to respond to citizens' request. Besides, the political will is also a condition for any political process to succeed. Furthermore, training of people inside the administration is necessary as well.

CONCLUSIONS

The general conclusions resulting from the discussion are the following:

- Political commitment to address citizens' needs and demands is the first step necessary to enhance civic participation but is not sufficient without complementary, trained, and efficient public administration.
- Different categories should be ensured equality in accessing the democratic participatory process. Then technology is important to implement accessibility, ease the dialogue between citizens and public administration, and support the responsiveness to citizens' demands.
- Civic participation cannot be deemed effective or sufficient in primary phases only: a participatory democracy requires continuous and ongoing engagement, by uploading inputs, reactions, and needs and responding to them in a transparent way.
- Misinformation and risks related to technology should not be underestimated. Comprehension and involvement in multicultural ambiances are challenging but a source of enrichment to the participatory democracy itself.