



**DIGITAL CITIZEN PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES**  
**How to facilitate democratic**  
**processes and foster citizen engagement in the European Union?**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, the political processes both within the European Union and outside of it have faced a crisis in trust of the process of democratic representation. An increasingly low level of trust in both political actors and legislative processes is being documented in advanced democracies. Simultaneously, as we progress into the digital age and increasingly live within the contexts of the digital environments, the development of digital technologies has provided a space for digital practices which allow citizens to take part in the governance process to some extent. This paper aims to explore how two digital participatory practices, ManaBalss from Latvia and Lisboa Participa (Lisbon participatory budget) from Portugal, facilitate democratic processes. It is asserted that digital participatory practices can to some extent aid the democratic process and thus their inclusion in the policy creation and decision-making process should be fostered.

### Social Media summary

How can digital citizen participatory practices aid the democratic process by including citizens?

### Keywords

#participatory #digital participatory practices #citizen inclusion #e-participation

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## 1. Theoretical and contextual introduction

In recent years, the political processes both within the European Union and outside of it have faced a crisis of trust in the process of democratic representation. An increasingly low level of trust in both political actors and legislative processes, as well as citizens being equally represented in them, is being documented as a global phenomenon. It is argued that disillusionment with politicians and representation is a widespread phenomenon (Tormey, 2015). Following this, the decline of political interest and voting engagement has been argued from the 1960s to the present and attributed to the growing distrust and disappointment in the government and politicians (Keane, 2009; Rosanvallon, 2008; Tormey, 2014; Tormey, 2015). Citizens of democratic countries show less trust in their politicians and no longer take their claims of representation as serious, as they are instead perceived to be acting in their own interests. This is seen as the growing decline of trust in the credibility of political parties. The consequences of this have been interpreted as an increasing apathy regarding political engagement and a decline of interest in politics (Putnam, 2000; Tormey, 2014). Small voter turnout and decline in party memberships are thought to be among the most revealing indicators (Tormey, 2014; Tormey, 2015). Globalization and denationalization, meaning the weakening of the power of the nation-state have contributed to this phenomenon - this further means that the lives of citizens of nation-states are more dependent on the decisions of the international bodies (Tormey, 2014). Their lives are also more dependent on the direct link to global networks of capital and information that is a new form of globalization characteristic of our time and whose effects, as well as its logic of exclusion and inclusion, are felt by the whole world, accompanied by the loss of the capacity of the institutions of the nation-state inherited from the period of industrial capitalism to control the global flow of capital and information (Castells, 2010). This kind of globalization gave rise to a more deregulated form of capitalism internationally, partly resulting in the 2008 global financial crisis, which further provoked dissatisfaction with the current representative modes of a democratic system of governance.

However, some theories argue that the situation is more complex than the simple waning of political interest. Rosanvallon (2008) challenges the ideas of depoliticization as misleading when describing the discontent of the citizens with the situation where their voices are heard only during elections, as well as the idea of the retreat of citizens from the public sphere to private life. Instead, he views the process as the transformation of political activity - he believes that although electoral democracy has eroded, democratic involvement and intervention have developed and gained strength (Rosanvallon, 2008: p. 21). This has been noted in many theoretical observations in recent years. Mechanisms of criticism of the system of governance are on the rise in modern democracies. It could be compared to what Keane (2009) calls monitory democracy and what he claims is developing since the year 1945, characterized by the rise in power-disputing and power-checking bodies, together with the request for greater public accountability (Keane, 2009). Keane posits that among the qualities of monitory democracy is precisely a change of the architecture of democracy towards deliberating and voting procedures applied in a manner that creates a mode of governing in which governments are increasingly subjected to mechanisms of checks and balances (Keane, 2009).

Furthermore, some theorists argue that there is a growing process of individualization occurring in the current historical period of second modernity which is characterized the reflexivity, meaning



that the underpinnings of the institutions of modernity are being reassessed- in the realm of politics, this is manifest in the political system losing its monopoly of politics and alongside the forms of parliamentary democracy, forms of a culture that becomes conscious of itself politically and self-organized political actions that are taking shape (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: p. 45). Inglehart and Wenzel (2005) also argue based on their research that the situation is more complex than the simple decline of interest in politics. While there is a noted decline in the traditional and elite-directed forms of participation such as voting and political party membership, simultaneously intrinsically motivated, expressive, and elite-challenging forms of participation have increasingly risen leading to changing types of political action (Inglehart and Wenzel, 2005: p. 116-117). There is declining confidence in government in the sense of the old-style hierarchical elite-directed organizations and membership in political parties, however, there is a noted growing tendency towards „elite-challenging participation“ (Inglehart and Wenzel, 2005: p. 118). The development of the digital citizen participatory practices can also be seen as situated within this wider historical development of the social context of late modernity.

The most recent phenomena in this area have been interpreted as the waning of the paradigm of representative democracy and the introduction of post-representative democracy (Keane, 2009; Tormey, 2012; Tormey, 2014). This is seen as a revolution in terms of political mobilization moving away from the parties that represent and towards forms of politics that directly impact the political field (Tormey 2014: p. 109). It is the field from which different kinds of mobilizations such as protests, citizen initiatives, or immediate politics, emerged (Tormey, 2014:p. 109). These kinds of initiatives often tend to form into a more institutionalized framework and become a legal entity through which they influence their local democratic environment. These kinds of initiatives seek to bring citizens closer to the decision-making power and find a point where they can make an impact (Tormey, 2014: p. 110). In this sense, post-representative democracy is not anti-democratic. Instead, it speaks to a certain recuperation of the sense of democracy as the affair of the *demos* themselves, not their representatives (Tormey, 2014: p. 111). In other words, the tendency is to empower the citizens to take part in the decision-making process. It is also important to note that the governments can be an interested party in the inclusion of citizens in the processes of decision-making. Rosanvallon sees participation as a response to an increased demand for a modern form of governance (Rosanvallon, 2008: p. 296). While citizens want their interest considered in a more persistent manner in-between the elections, governments look for new ways to shore their legitimacy in consulting with their constituents, as well as efficient ways of administration and problem-solving together with the people at the base who might possess more information for identifying the problem (Rosanvallon, 2008: p. 296). It is explored in this paper how participatory practices can in this manner foster democratic participation. Based on two case studies, the article explores how these practices can be considered a movement towards bridging the gap between the distrust in power of elected representatives and voicing of citizens' needs between the elections. Can they heighten the sense of democratic participation?

The need for more citizen participation is recognized to some extent by the European Union. The European Commission recognizes in its European Democracy Action Plan that democracy is about “the richness of participatory practices, civic engagement” (EC, 2020b). It also acknowledges the need for promoting democratic engagement and participation beyond elections. It recognizes that new steps in participatory and deliberative democracy have been taken in the several Member States, by getting people involved in decision- and policymaking and thus empowering them, while simultaneously enhancing democratic legitimacy and trust (EC, 2020b).



Participatory practices which involve citizens in the decision- and policymaking and whose focus is digital are explored in this paper since as we progress into the digital age we increasingly live within the contexts of digital environments. Thus, unveiling of the potential of the use of ICTs in participatory processes to enhance citizen engagement in democratic governance is a natural progression in recent years, aided by the exploration of possibilities of participation due to the crisis of democratic representation described above. The use of ICTs can aid the participatory processes since the internet architecture can make democratic processes easier to administer and can facilitate citizens' possibility for participation. E-participation is explored as a process that is characterized by the increased inclusion of citizens in the process. E-participation is defined by Van Dijk precisely as "the use of digital media to mediate and transform the relations of citizens to governments and public administrations in the direction of more participation by citizens" (Van Dijk, 2012: p. 9). In this sense, ICT presents an opportunity to utilize technological development to initiate change in the relation of citizens and their representatives. This has been recognized by many countries, and thus e-participation is today visibly more institutionalized than a decade ago, moving from pilot projects to the mainstream in many countries (United Nations & LeBlanc, 2020).

However, this process is hardly smooth. The challenges are to be anticipated in finding the concrete mechanisms that function and ways in which digital participatory practices can be embedded within specific institutional frameworks and more than two-hundred years old and established mechanisms of representative democracies. It is thus not surprising that e-participation is still mostly used in the phases of agenda-setting, policy preparation, and policy evaluation and provides added value for users, while its success in the decision-making part of the process has been unclear (Van Dijk, 2012; Aichholzer & Rose, 2020). Former are the parts of the democratic process where digital participation is most easily embedded, while the ways in which it could be implemented in the very decision-making part of the democratic process are harder to achieve since the environments in which decision-making happens usually involve a large number of institutionally established procedures and decisions on a daily basis. They also require a political willingness of the governing subject to relinquish part of the decision-making power, as well as expert knowledge of the functioning of the institutional framework of governance. In general, the support of decision-makers and their engagement is identified as the key factor of success of e-participation initiatives, while mobilization and inclusiveness are identified as the main challenges (Aichholzer & Rose, 2020; United Nations & LeBlanc, 2020; Van Dijk, 2012). According to the latest data available from the year 2019 in the EU, the proportion of the EU-27's population that had never used the internet was 10%, while 92% of households in urban settings and 86% of households in rural settings in the EU had internet access (Eurostat, 2019). Inclusion and accessibility are thus also recognized as potential challenges to some extent, especially in relation to the digital literacy and digital skills which become a necessity to participate in today's society (EC, 2020a). The European Union recognizes the importance of digital participatory practices to some extent. One of the objectives in the Communication "Shaping Europe's digital future" on which the EU plans to focus in the next five years is "an open, democratic and sustainable society (...) in which citizens are empowered in how they act and interact." (EC, 2020a). It is also stressed in this document that Europe needs to pool its investments in research and innovation, to share experiences while promoting the digital transformation of public administration simultaneously (EC, 2020a). It is important to raise the awareness of the citizens of the possibilities that ICTs offer for their influence on political decisions. European Commission in its Communication „2030 Digital



Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade “ argues that the European way for the digital society should support open democracy initiatives by contributing to inclusive policy-making and stimulating grass-roots action for developing local initiatives” (EC, 2021). Thus, it can be seen that, at the level of its public policies, the EU recognizes the value of digital participation in democratic governance to some extent, while it seeks to explore ways in which it can be established.

Successful citizen engagement through digital participatory practices can be considered a challenging task. It requires an exploration of how to effectively embed the mechanisms of citizen participation into specifics of a particular democratic environment and its institutional framework to create an effect in terms of actual impact on decision-making. It demands constant alertness and efforts related to inclusiveness of the process and communication in order to engage the general population. It requires the exploration in which part of the democratic process citizens are engaged and how this relates to overall decision-making. It is assumed that in order to foster engagement, a digital participatory practice has to heighten the sense of engagement of the local community. In other words, in order for the citizens to feel the trust in democratic process, they have to see the visible impact of their engagement. In this phase of the development of citizen participation, we are still at the beginning of envisioning what this process might look like. As Tormey argues, we are currently in the period in-between regarding what democracy was for two hundred years and what it might be - one vision looks exhausted but difficult to overcome and other visions are still in the phase of experimentation, so this phase is a phase of constant renegotiation of what democracy means and how it works for whom, from citizens to powerholders (Tormey, 2015).

The exploration in this paper has to be viewed in this context. There are a lot of questions in the present phase of studying the mechanisms of digital participatory practices which are, compared to the more than two hundred years of tradition and mechanisms of representative democracies, still at its beginnings. How can the specific design of certain digital participatory practice facilitate the democratic process? Can having an impact already in a certain part of the policy creation foster the democratic process to some extent? How is this related to the overall decision-making process?

To address these questions in this paper, Graham Smith’s (2009) analytical framework is used in the assessment of the case studies. Graham Smith is interested in whether institutions can be designed to directly engage what has been termed “lay” citizens as opposed to experts and in the extent in which participation can have a direct influence on political decisions (Smith, 2009: p. 2). He developed the analytical framework for the evaluation of what he terms “democratic innovations”: institutions that have been specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process (Smith, 2009: p. 1). Digital participatory practices that will be analysed in this paper were specifically designed with the intention to increase citizen participation and can thus be considered as democratic innovations. Smith’s analytical framework will be used to assess to what extent these innovations realize desirable qualities or goods that are expected of democratic institutions (Smith, 2009). It is assumed that the greater realization of these produces the greater proximity to the democratic ideal and facilitation of the democratic process including citizen participation in the political decision-making process (Smith, 2009:p. 27). The democratic goods referred to are, as follows: inclusiveness - how unequal participation can be overcome, popular control - how citizens can be empowered in the decision-making process, considered judgment - how the environment can be structured to enable informed judgments, transparency - how proceedings can be open to participants and observers, efficiency



and transferability (Smith, 2009:p. 27). Thus, the ways in which digital participatory practice can fulfil these criteria show how it engages citizens and whether and how it impacts democratic process.



## 2. Background and methodology

Two digital participatory practices of entirely different characteristics were chosen for the case study. ManaBalss and Lisbon Participatory budget (PB) were chosen as examples of innovative digital participatory practices. Their choice was based partly on their opposing sources of emergence and institutional frameworks.

Latvian ManaBalss is a “bottom-up” initiative that arose in the year 2011 from the citizen-led initiative related to the aftermath of the financial crisis and it remained privately led. At the same time, it aims at political impact at the national level. This provides an example in which it can be explored how an independent organization can function as a link between the will of the citizens and state institutions and how an online practice can directly impact the legislative process on the national level.

Lisbon PB was chosen as the “top-down” digital participatory practice created by the municipal government for the inclusion of citizens in the decision-making process at the local level. Both practices were also chosen on the grounds that they exist for more than a decade, thereby presuming that this is sufficient time-length to establish a mechanism of digital participatory practice, as well as to acquire some lessons based on the challenges faced and consequent improvements.

The information and the data used in creating this paper were obtained through the secondary research which included the analysis of ManaBalss and Lisboa Participa platforms, available statistical data, relevant national and local regulations, recommendations issued by the European Commission, and reports funded or issued by the European Union or international organizations such as the United Nations, as well as the data obtained from the organization MyVoice behind the ManaBalss platform and Lisbon Municipality behind the LisboaParticipa, in the course of written correspondence.

The limitation of the case studies is found in the scarcity of clear statistical data regarding the initiatives mentioned and the lack of independent evaluation. This is not unexpected regarding the above-mentioned novelty of these kinds of practices; however, future studies should focus on these areas in order to achieve a more wholesome picture. The evaluation of the case studies presented was carried out based on Graham Smith's analytical framework (Smith, 2009) in terms of the above-mentioned inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgment, transparency, efficiency, and transferability. It is postulated that the realization of these goods brings the digital participatory practice closer to the democratic ideal and in this sense, consequently, in fostering the democratic process.





### 3. ManaBalss

ManaBalss (<https://manabalss.lv/>), translated as “MyVoice”, is a private platform for public participation in Latvia where any citizen can propose their legislative initiative to the parliament. It was launched in July 2011 by the socially active tech/startup entrepreneur Kristofs Blaus and marketing expert Jānis Erts. It was promoted by popular media, culture, and academy personalities, mentored by progressive think-tank experts and supported by progressive politicians on the rise (MyVoice organization, 2021). It also happened at the moment in which the deep political crisis was felt in Latvia as a result of the lack of trust in institutions and politicians after the economic crisis in 2008-2009, linked to the global economic crisis in 2008 and the felt need for more citizen inclusion.

The platform allows any voter older than 16, who is registered in the Republic of Latvia, to register to propose legislative initiatives to the parliament or sign the initiative. Politically neutral legal entities can also submit the initiative. The currently proposed initiatives and the current state of signatures can be viewed on the website’s front page. Any initiative on the platform that is submitted and then reaches 10 000 signatures is put forward to The Saeima, the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia, for the hearing. After the confirmation of the number of legitimate signatures the initial examination of the submission takes place in the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee, where the person authorized to represent the signatories of the collective submission has the opportunity to present the idea to representatives of all political groups and to take part in the debate. After this, the Mandate Committee reports on the evaluation to the Saeima (Rules of Procedure of the Saeima, 2021: p. 26).

The sign-in to the platform is enabled using online banking services and online signature or passport or ID card. The platform puts an emphasis on a strong authentication system, so the name, surname, and personal identification code which are taken from the users are stored in the secure databases and, at the demand of Saeima, the Latvian parliament, are compared to the register of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of Latvia to verify the citizens’ identity (ManaBalss, 2021b). Any initiative can be proposed if it is in compliance with the platforms’ criteria. The legal ones are focused on its attainability through the existing legislative framework and the alignment with the Constitution, as well as against demands in opposition to the culture of democracy and in opposition to human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, human rights, and rights of minorities (ManaBalss, 2021a). The quality criteria is also exercised; to contain concrete recommendations for implementation of changes, to be grounded in reliable and evidence-based information, to be presented in correct Latvian language and to be accompanied by a picture that illustrates its point (ManaBalss, 2021a). The platform provides assistance in terms of feedback on the proposed initiatives, from the linguistic to the content-related ones. It is important to note that the organization puts an emphasis on the constant feedback loop with the community through their own content, social media and media relations which is seen as a crucial part of the platform’s success, together with the continuing civic lobbying and government relations (MyVoice organization, 2021).



The possibility of the electronic initiatives collecting 10 000 signatures to enter the legislative process is established in the Rules of Procedure of the Saeima, as adopted by the 19 January 2012 Law. It is allowed for at least 10,000 citizens of Latvia to file a collective submission with the Saeima, together with a brief justification. It has to be submitted by the person authorized to represent the signatories, while the collection of electronic signatures is also allowed, as long as the possibility to identify signatories and protection of personal data is ensured (Rules of Procedure of the Saeima, 2021:p. 26). The number of 10,000 citizens was at the time 0,5% of Latvia's population. This was preceded by a year of lobbying for the legislative change to implement collective submissions.

The number of unique visitors/users of the website since the year 2011 up until 2nd July 2021 is 387 817. There were 2 073 670 votes for the initiatives since 2011, 610 initiatives launched and 1465 reviewed, consulted, answered but not launched initiatives. There were 71 initiatives that were sent to review to the Saeima and 70 initiatives that reached the voting (1 was not regarded as a collective submission). ManaBalss has the success rate of 39 approved initiatives that resulted in the legislative change, including a constitutional change - an open parliamentary vote for the President of the State, which is a rare example when citizens amended the constitution basically via the internet (MyVoice organization, 2021). 14,8% of Latvians have voted on the platform since its beginning (Manabalss, 2021b). Its statistics point to the rise in the number of the initiatives both submitted to the site for consideration and launched through it - from 25/215 in the year 2011 to 109/273 in 2020 (MyVoice organization, 2021). The results of the initiatives submitted to the Saeima and the processes of the resulting legislative change are also partly published on the Saeima's webpage (<http://mandati.saeima.lv/kolekt%C4%ABvie-iesniegumi>), which adds to the transparency of the process for citizens.

The organization behind the ManaBalss, "My Voice", founded in 2011 is funded by donations of the citizens, grants, and projects, while it also offers the paid service of proposing the initiative for political parties, firms, and business lobbyists. MyVoice also develops other tools for civic participation, putting Latvia forward among the EU countries regarding the involvement of the public in the decision-making process. Currently, it participates in work on the Latvian fifth nation action plan of open government 2022-2025 through the public consultation tool "Open Latvia" (<https://atvertalatvija.manabalss.lv/>), indicating that the organization has established itself as a crucial stakeholder in open participation processes at the national level. The "Fourth national open government partnership action plan of Latvia 2020-2021" stresses the existence of the e-initiatives and identifies challenges as low involvement of citizens, lack of awareness of the importance of participation and lack of knowledge and skills, lack of participatory planning and provision (Open Government Partnership, 2020). Indeed, the 14,8% of citizens participating in ManaBalss seems low compared to the average voter turnout (63%) in Latvia (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2021). However, low participation level is a common issue for e-citizen initiatives (United Nations & LeBlanc, 2021; Aichholzer & Rose, 2020) which requires further exploration. The organization itself has noted the challenge of the motivation of the team behind the platform, which was improved in 2015/16 by the establishment of the funding through micro-donations and hiring of regular staff, and a direction set towards the expansion of the digital participation in Latvia via new tools and knowledge transfer internationally (MyVoice organization, 2021). One of the lessons of the ManaBalss case study is that a highly regulated process on how to submit the proposition of legislative change, together with the quality control and structure of the process that



aids citizens in proposing the initiatives is an important constituent of successful digital participatory practices.

The application of Smith's analytical framework (Smith, 2009: p. 27) to the digital innovation that ManaBalss constitutes invites us to observe to what extent the above mentioned democratic goods are realized within it; inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgment, transparency, efficiency and transferability (Smith, 2009: p. 27). In the case of the ManaBalss platform, inclusiveness is present in the sense that the design of collective submission proposals procedure is constructed in such a manner that one is guided through the process in a way that requires no previous knowledge of the legislative framework or the construction of the content of the submissions. This is a kind of functional design that fosters inclusion since the average citizen might not have sufficient knowledge of the functioning of the legislative proposal proceedings or the content of the specific law. Thus, to provide support in the parts of the process which require specific political or public administration knowledge is an important part of citizen political activation. The language of the platform is also very simple. These design functionalities are important for the inclusion of all groups of society in the process. However, the exact socio-economic structure of the users behind the portal, and the inclusion of traditionally excluded groups with lower digital skills such as seniors in the proposal submissions remain unclear. Since its service is entirely online, the organization is working on seeking ways to engage the digitally illiterate population and is for some time now seeking organizational partners who could provide assistance with this matter, from public libraries to municipal service centres, however, is faced with many institutional, legal and practical challenges (MyVoice organization, 2021). Since its main focus is not closing the digital divide and this presumably requires greater personnel and financial capacities, the digital divide remains a challenge for the time being. As for Smith's good of popular control (Smith, 2009: p. 27), the enabling of the collective submissions to be sent directly to the parliament of the country, with the guidance and the quality control process that regards only technical aspects of the proposals and does not interfere with the content (unless it touches into democratic values), means that the decision about the content stays exclusively with the proposer of the submission and voting users. With its success of 37 initiatives that resulted in the change of legislation, it can be said that ManaBalss constitutes a distinguished example of how citizens can be empowered to some extent in the decision-making process. The level of the citizens' popular control is high in the initial phase of the creation of the collective submission (phase of agenda-setting of policy proposals) and includes taking part in the initial phase of the legislative process which is the review of the collective submission by the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee. The final decision-making of whether the submission is further processed stays with the Saeima. In Smith's terms, popular control is high within the area of agenda-setting but the scope of participation is then limited by the powers of the relevant public authority (Smith, 2009: p. 23).

However, the process of further decision-making of the Saeima can be monitored on the webpage of the Saeima, which can be safely assumed to contribute to the sense of agency in the case of accepted proposals and legislative change visible on the website. This way of direct legislative proposals submitting gives citizens popular control in terms of a direct channel of expression of their will towards the representatives between the elections. The possibility of minorities suffering from discriminatory issues since popular control is the will of the general public (Smith, 2009: p. 186) is prevented through the mechanism of eligibility which doesn't allow propositions that are against democratic culture, and thus also violate the rights of minorities, to pass. As for the value



of the considered judgment (Smith, 2009: p. 27), with its highly regulated process of acquisition and new initiative proposals, ManaBalss is an example of how the organizational environment of digital innovation can be structured to enable informed judgements.

As described above, citizens are thoroughly guided through the procedure - Smith recognizes the need of the citizens to be well informed on the technical aspects of the issue under consideration as the first part of the considered judgment (Smith, 2009: p. 173). As for the other part of the considered judgment which requires citizens not to be limited by their own private interests, but to reflect on the views of other citizens and how their proposals might affect the conditions and circumstances of the others (Smith, 2009: p. 173), it can be safely assumed that the level of guidance which ManaBalss provides for the proposers enables them to cultivate considered judgement in relation to alternatives. Moreover, the data show a significant increase in the number of the launched initiatives and number of those submitted for consideration to the platform - in comparison with 2011, when 25 out of 215 submitted initiatives were launched, in 2015 38 out of 166 submitted initiatives were launched, while in 2019, 61 out of 195 submitted initiatives were launched and in 2020, 109 initiatives were launched out of 273 submitted to consideration to the platform (MyVoice organization, 2021). The rise in the number of submitted and launched initiatives points to the rise in citizen engagement. Furthermore, the rise also points to the assumption that the platform cultivates informed judgement in the sense that it has an educational purpose in terms of citizens taking part in the democratic process and learning how to design an acceptable submission for legislative change to the parliament. As for the voters on particular submission, one can only speculate to what extent they are able to exercise considered judgment while voting on certain initiatives. The text of each proposal is explained in detailed manner on the platform and the news on the content of the proposal is offered and linked to the initiative on the platform, so it can be assumed that this aids the informed judgement of the voters and the wider public to some extent. Although there are possibilities to comment on the initiative on social networks, the emphasis of the platform is not on this kind of deliberation.

The subject of transparency is another democratic good (Smith, 2009: p. 176), signifying the openness of the proceedings to participants and observers. Smith recognizes internal transparency, which is the extent to which participants are made aware of the conditions under which they are participating (Smith, 2009: p. 176) - in ManaBalss this is very clearly and in a detailed manner elaborated on the platform through the rules under which the submission is possible. The other kind of transparency is the external transparency of publicity in terms of the extent to which the non-participating public is aware of how the innovation functions, its role in the decision-making process and how participants came to their judgments (Smith, 2009: p. 176). In other words, citizens should be able to understand the functioning of the process. It can be said that through the brand of ManaBalss the organization MyVoice has established recognition of the functioning of the process in the community of Latvia. The organization puts an emphasis on building relationships with the media and local community daily, as well as giving feedback, indicating an understanding of the importance of publicity and transparency regarding the process, as well as cultivating relationships with the key stakeholders. The process of the acceptance or refusals of the collective submissions is visible for some initiatives on the website of Saeima, which adds to the transparency of the process. This is important since it can be safely assumed that it can foster citizens' sense of agency by making the direct influence of their legislative proposals explicitly visible.



As for the democratic good of efficiency, ManaBalss.lv is seen as the only proven effective way to gather legitimate signatures in the legislated quantity to qualify for a collective submission - other attempts at gathering additional signatures in written form prove more difficult to administer due to the large number of unclear or mistaken entries (MyVoice organization, 2021). It can also be safely assumed that the non-electronic collection of the same number of signatures for initiatives would require more resources in terms of personnel and finance for each initiative.

Regarding the democratic good of transferability, the transfer of ManaBalss to another country would require significant effort. Namely, the legislative framework in which 10,000 signatures collected electronically are enough to initiate collective submission to the parliament is a precondition of existence for this kind of practice. In Latvia, it was advocated by the MyVoice initiative. In many countries of the EU, there is no such legislative framework. Countries in which citizens can present a legislative initiative to national parliaments seem to be in the minority: Latvia, Austria, Portugal, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Switzerland, Spain (Valtenbergs & Čaplinska, 2021: p. 15). This points to the issue of having to adapt the legislative framework in a particular country as a precondition for the transfer of this model of citizen engagement. This would require the creation of a willing political subject/initiative to advocate for this kind of legislative change which is expected to be a significant part of the transfer. Identified as the crucial aspect of transferability prospects in this kind of digital participatory practice is the willingness of the government to cooperate and adapt its legislative framework to allow for collective citizen submissions to be reviewed in the national parliament. Further, if the model is transferred in terms of a private organization taking this role, the question of funding is identified as a challenge. Would the Latvian model of micro-donations work in other cultural contexts as well? It can be pointed here to the mechanisms of EU funding as the instrument of potential aid.

In conclusion, the ManaBalss model of agenda-setting through collective electronic submissions of legislative initiatives realizes popular control (in the part of agenda-setting), considered judgment, efficiency, and transparency to a large degree, while inclusiveness and transferability remain a challenge. ManaBalss model seems to be based on the specific Latvian context in which it has received support both from the political and media sector, aided by their continuous advocacy and building of relations with the civic and government sector. This kind of environment could be a challenge to recreate in other countries. Determining factors here are both the government that is willing to engage in this kind of communication with citizens and the efforts of the initiative to build and maintain relationships with crucial stakeholders in the process and in this manner to position themselves in the institutional context of a particular country, as well as the building of public trust.

Long-term funding is an identified challenge that could potentially be overcome by linking the EU funding mechanisms with the efforts of similar initiatives. IT infrastructure and the highly regulated process of submissions aiding citizens in creating legislative proposals that lead to an increase in their proposal submitting have a definite impact on a decision-making process, at least in the agenda-setting part of policy creation. Although the final decision remains in the hands of the legislative body, it is argued here that this kind of digital participatory practice fosters the democratic process in the direction of empowerment of the public by enabling it to set agendas between two elections to some extent and educating it on the process.

It should thus be disseminated as a good practice example, while recognizing the amount of effort needed to adapt the institutional framework, to build relations with its crucial stakeholders in order



to enable the embedding of such digital participatory practice within it and to achieve sustainability.



#### **4. Lisboa Participa (Lisbon Participatory Budget)**

Lisboa Participa is the platform of the Lisbon Municipality for participatory budgeting. Lisbon was the first European capital to introduce online participatory budgeting. There already existed advisory participative budgeting in Lisbon, and the municipal government of minority coalition, supported by social groups and political activists felt the need in the year 2007 to search for new ways of participatory governance, so they organized participatory events to collect input from citizens about priorities for the next years, which turned into the establishment of the PB process in the year 2008 (Allegretti & Antunes, 2014).

The role of the commitment of the Lisbon Municipality to the PB process over the years (and its ability to do so due to continuous rule of the socialist political party (PS)) has to be noted as an important factor of its continuity. The process enables citizens to participate in the spending of part of the city's budget (announced annually) in a manner that is binding for the city government. The emphasis is put on the online proposal submitting and voting through the portal [lisboaparticipa.pt](https://lisboaparticipa.pt). The idea behind the process was to find new ways of co-governing and deciding on the budget together with citizens. The Charter of Principles for Lisbon Participatory Budgeting states that one of the main aims of participatory budgeting is to foster citizens to identify their concerns related to the common good and acquire the skill of participation, to adjust the municipal public policies to the people's needs and increase in transparency of the governance contributing to reinforcing the quality of local democracy (Carta de Principios OP Lisboa, 2021).

From 2008 to 2019 (the last available statistics is available for the year 2019), 11 editions of the participatory budgeting were completed, 10 evaluation reports ensued and there were 139 projects the implementation of which was decided through the participatory budgeting (Lisbon Municipality, 2021). The data below show a steady rise in citizen participation regarding voting over the years.



*Table 1. Lisbon Participatory Budget statistical data*

Source: Relatório Da Edição 2018/2019, p. 3

	<b>Proposals (face-to-face initiatives)</b>	<b>Submitted proposals</b>	<b>Voted-on projects</b>	<b>Winning projects</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>PB Budget amount</b>
<b>2008</b>		580	89	5	1101	5.130.176
<b>2009</b>		533	200	12	4719	4.817.492
<b>2010</b>	492	927	291	7	11570	4.500.000
<b>2011</b>	417	808	228	5	17887	4.600.000
<b>2012</b>	288	659	231	15	29911	2.375.000
<b>2013</b>	172	551	208	16	35922	2.475.000
<b>2014</b>	298	669	211	13	36032	2.428.000
<b>2015</b>	125	481	189	15	42130	2.500.000
<b>2016</b>	210	562	182	17	51591	2.480.000
<b>2017</b>	29	434	128	15	37673	2.500.000
<b>2018</b>	223	539	122	19	34672	2.500.000

It is important to note the all-encompassing nature of participation in the Lisbon PB. Namely, Lisbon's participatory budgeting process allows all citizens older than 16 to participate, since it is considered that non-residents who work or study in Lisbon should also take part in shaping the city. This option is utilized by non-residents - the structure of participation in the year 2018/2019 consisted of 11% of those who worked in the city, 10% of the students, and even included 1,5% of visitors to the city (Relatório Da Edição, 2018/2019).

The participatory budgeting process is organized through 3 cycles: Decision, Execution and Evaluation. The annual Decision cycle begins in March with suggestions and approval of the operating rules for the annual participatory budget proceedings (Normas OP) which are published online. These annual standards set out the procedure, the timeframe of the decision cycle, the amount of the budget allocated for the current year, and the eligibility criteria for proposals. The participatory portion of the city budget for the year 2021 is 2,500,000 EUR (starting with approximately 5 million EUR in the year 2008 and reduced since due to the financial crisis). This is however only approx. 0,7 - 1% of the whole city budget (Lisbon Municipality, 2021), inviting criticisms that the decision-making of the citizens is related to only a small amount of the city's budget. The projects that can be proposed are divided into two groups: a) proposals for projects involving public works contracts whose amount is less than €150,000 (one hundred and fifty thousand euros); and project proposals involving the acquisition or leasing of movable property or



the acquisition of services worth less than €75,000 (seventy-five thousand euros). In the PB 2018/2019 the “Green seal” was introduced, which was awarded to all the projects that promoted and evaluated the sustainability of the environment. Furthermore, thematic areas of OP 2021 emphasize environmental sustainability, following the European Green Award Capital that Lisbon received in the year 2020. The proposals can be submitted online on the Participation Portal (<https://op.lisboaparticipa.pt/>) and through the Participatory Assemblies. After submission of the proposals, the Parish Councils (boroughs) in conjunction with the PB Working Group carry out the technical analysis and compliance with the annual standards. The proposals submitted must be of interest to the city and the common good of citizens, they must be non-profit and eligible. To be considered eligible, the proposal must follow certain rules: be presented in the individual name (with the valid e-mail address); be inserted into thematic areas and territorial circumscription of a properly identified Parish Council, respect human rights, freedoms, and guarantees; have lack of a conflict of (private) interest; not already be foreseen in the other municipal activities plans; be specific, well defined in its execution and limited in the territory for analysis and concrete budgeting within the maximum value limits for each project; and be technically feasible within the deadlines and maximum admissible values (Lisboa Participa, 2021). The rules of participation in the PB process are thus laid out in a simple, clear, and transparent manner. The portal for participation integrates back-office, where all the proposals of the PB and procedures of the cycle are registered, as well as their technical analysis by the municipal services and parish councils, reasons for their rejection or adaptation which are implemented by the participatory budget team, integrating communal services, municipal and parish councils (Relatório Da Edição, 2018/2019). This adds to the transparency of the process, although the need for the simplification of the back office has been identified (Relatório Da Edição, 2018/2019). Furthermore, since the standards of the PB are established on an annual basis, this enables their improvement by the possibility of incorporation of lessons acquired from the previous year’s evaluation. In this sense, Lisbon’s PB process has over the years demonstrated a commendable ability to learn from previous cycles and adapt accordingly.

Upon the technical analysis, the Parish Councils and the PB Working Group adapt the eligible proposals to projects. The provisional list of ineligible projects is published together with the respective grounds for their exclusion. The citizens may file complaints that are answered by the Working Group and the Parish Councils, and the proposal which was excluded may be reinstated upon appropriate improvement suggestions. The introduction of this part of the process is considered particularly important since it adds to the citizen’s impact on the decision-making and transparency of the process. After that, the final list of projects to be put to vote is made. Voting can be done online at the Participation Portal or via SMS. Each citizen has the right to vote on two different projects, with one vote for each group of projects (one vote for public works contract projects and one vote for projects that involve the acquisition of goods or services). The winning projects are then ranked and announced at a public ceremony and published on the Participation Portal. Within the Execution cycle (annual, biannual or electoral mandate), the projects are implemented by the Parish Councils or by the Municipal Services (such as Environment, Urbanism, Mobility, etc.). Regular information on the execution of projects is provided to citizens on the Participation Portal. This cycle includes the involvement of the proponents of the winning projects, with meetings expected to be held at an early stage of project development, ensuring that the proponent participates in the final executed solution. Once the project is completed, the City Council in collaboration with the Parish Councils organizes the inauguration ceremony to which



proponents are invited. The way in which this cycle is structured points to the efforts in ensuring transparency and inclusion of citizens in the implementation phase. The Annual Evaluation cycle consists of evaluation report setting, filling in the surveys, proposals for improvement of the subsequent editions, closing of the report, its approval, and online publication (Lisbon Municipality, 2021). Lisbon's participatory budgeting process is envisioned as the process of continuous evolution, whereby the improvements are implemented every year based on the lessons acquired in the evaluation of the previous cycles.

When analysing the Lisbon PB through Smith's criteria of democratic goods further can be concluded. In terms of inclusiveness, the Lisbon PB has over the years made significant efforts to include unrepresented groups into the decision-making process. The decisive years have been the year 2010, in which the need was expressed by citizens to create more face-to-face venues that accompany internet participation (Relatório de Avaliação e Propostas de Melhoria, 2010). This resulted in the creation of the Participatory Assemblies and various venues for the inclusion of citizens experimented with throughout the years, such as buses or bike mobile stations. It is important to note that Lisbon PB is also extensively advertised and communicated through various channels, including newspapers, ads in the public transport network, posters, and digital channels such as social networks. Still, the participation remains lower for the age group over the 65 years - 15% in 2018/2019, while the highest proportion of participation is in the age group of the 18-29 - 34%. This reflects the dominant trend of the low participation of the elderly population that accompanies digital participatory practices around the world. However, although participants with a high level of education are still dominant in the structure of participation, constituting 48% of participants in the year 2018/2019, there is a rise in the percentage of the participants with secondary education from 18% in the year 2009/2010 to 42% in the year 2018/2019 (Relatório Da Edição, 2018/2019; Relatorios Finais, 2009; Relatório Da Edição, 2017/2018). This points to the improvement of inclusiveness. Since efforts were made over the years to heighten multichannel participation, it can be assumed that this has helped the inclusion of traditionally excluded groups in the participatory process. The all-encompassing nature of the PB process which allows for the participation of non-residents also aids the inclusiveness of the process.

Furthermore, Smith's measure of the popular control or how much power citizens have in different parts of the decision-making process varies according to phases. Within the Decision cycle, citizen control is relatively high in the phase of budgetary proposals, complaints, and voting. Namely, citizens can make budgetary proposals but the creation of a thematic framework and eligibility criteria within the annual standards stays with the Municipality. Thus, while popular control is high in terms of proposing and voting on the projects, the agenda-setting is only partially under popular control. Also, since the decision on the feasibility of the projects that filters the projects to be put to vote is mostly within the Municipality jurisdiction, this might be considered as a hindrance to the fuller realization of popular control. However, popular control is still realized during the voting phase and the possibility of complaints. The introduction of the opportunity for citizens to make complaints to the Municipality's decision on feasibility has greatly contributed to the exercise of popular control in this part of the process. Within the Execution cycle, popular control is low since this part of the process is under the complete jurisdiction of the Municipality, but participants can monitor the implementation on the Lisboa Participa platform and in this manner exercise popular control to some extent. The efforts on the part of the Municipality to include citizens in the process are visible through meetings organized with proponents in the early phases of the project implementation and inauguration ceremony upon its completion.



The fact that citizens' evaluation of the process is taken annually as a guideline for the enhancement of the next cycle of participatory budgeting points toward the realization of popular control in the design of the overall process. It is also important to note the all-encompassing nature of the participant composition, which includes all citizens, not only residents, arguing for the possibility of the realization of popular control by all inhabitants in the city, not only residents. To sum up, popular control is realized in the phases of submission proposals, voting, and evaluation, while the institutional framework and implementation of chosen projects are under the control of the Municipality. One of the biggest hindrances to the exercise of the citizens' popular control is identified within the amount of the city budget - only approximately 1% of the total city budget, which is a small portion of the city's annual budget decided on in a participatory manner. This is an area for potential improvement towards a greater realization of popular control. Based on the evaluation surveys, it can be assumed that citizens feel empowered to some extent through the PB, since the overall impact of the PB was in the year 2018/2019 considered positive for 45% of participants of the online survey and very positive for 15% of the participants, while 45% of participants considered participating in the PB a matter of active citizenship (Relatório Da Edição, 2018/2019). Although the results of the online evaluation surveys might not be representative of the whole participating population, it can be considered that they point towards the importance that participating in the PB has for the sense of agency of the participants.

As for the exercise of Smith's considered judgment, the inclusion of face-to-face venues points towards the aim of structuring the environment to enable the cultivation of informed and thoughtful judgments, where citizen engagement and deliberation on the suggestions and clarification of the process is stimulated. To what extent this is utilized by citizens to exercise reflective assessment regarding the proposals can be only an informed guess, however, it is noteworthy that from 539 submitted proposals in the year 2018/2019, 316 was submitted online and 223 in the face-to-face initiatives, which shows that the option of face-to-face deliberation is utilized to some extent. The introduction of the participatory assemblies led to the progress in dialogue between citizens (Allegretti & Antunes, 2014). Also, 41% of participants in the evaluation process find participatory initiatives very important (Relatório Da Edição, 2018/2019).

Smith's measure of transparency is established through clear rules of participation and eligibility criteria explained in a simple manner on the platform. The monitoring part of transparency has been increased over the years due to the introduction of monitoring of implemented projects through the platform and the inclusion of the proponents in the early phases of the implementation phase. Also, the establishment of the period for complaints after the voting phase in the decision cycle contributed significantly to the transparency of the process. Furthermore, evaluations and results from citizens' survey, as well as data on participation, is available on the platform, within it included the shortcomings of the project as seen both by citizens and interlocutors from different stakeholders (Relatório Da Edição, 2018/2019). All of this points to a high level of transparency in the process. In matters of Smith's democratic good of efficiency, demanding to assess the costs that participation places on both citizens and public authorities (Smith, 2009; p. 26), it can be assumed that the costs of online participation or attending of assemblies are low for the citizens, while they simultaneously gain the venue for the expression of their needs in the city. Also, it is worthwhile noting that in this manner the Municipality gains an efficient channel of identifying potential problems in the city and their solutions. The data of the overall cost of Lisboa Participa PB for the Municipality remains unavailable and therefore current empirical parameters available



prevent conclusive findings on the matter of cost and benefit of this kind of digital participatory practice.

As for transferability, with the well-elaborated and transparent process that has over the years been established within the institutional framework of the Municipality of Lisbon on the process of learning from participatory evaluation annually, the Lisbon PB can be considered a good practice example with great potential for transferability to other municipalities. Although Lisbon PB enables citizens to have influence over a small portion of the City's budget, the process itself is clearly structured and fairly easy to follow and is in this sense suitable for dissemination. It can be assumed that this kind of design of the participatory budget could operate in and be adapted to different political contexts of local municipality budgets. Lisbon PB's method has, moreover, already served as the main inspiration for other municipal participatory budgets in Portugal (Falanga, 2018), confirming its potential for transferability. Its emphasis on the online digital participatory practice makes it easy to adapt to other political and institutional contexts, while offline participatory opportunities can then potentially be shaped according to the local cultural and institutional context.

In general, Lisbon's PB's can be considered a successful example of online digital participatory practice. What mostly points towards the heightening of citizen engagement is the steady increase in the numbers of citizens participating in the voting phase of the process, from 1101 votes in 2008 to 34672 votes in the year 2018 (Relatório Da Edição, 2018/2019). Although the latter number amounts to only approximately 1 % of the Lisbon inhabitants in the year 2018, it nevertheless constitutes a significant rise in citizen engagement. The efforts were made by the Municipality to realize inclusiveness, more popular control, and the considered judgment, as well as transparency. Its potential for transferability is also significant. Furthermore, evaluations are important to consider in the analysis of the overall impact. Although the final decision-making stays with the Municipality and there is room for improvements regarding the amount of the budget which is decided on in a participatory manner, agency which almost half of participating citizens feel through participation is an important point to consider. It can thus be proposed that this kind of digital participatory practice constitutes a noteworthy example of a participatory practice that fosters the democratic process.



## 5. Conclusions

Contemporary democracy is undergoing the processes of reassessing its own underpinning mechanisms. These changes are oriented towards potential constitution of new ways of democratic governance, characterized by citizens seeking more responsibility from politicians for decisions as well as the introduction of the responsibility-checking mechanisms into the processes of governance. How this process will unfold is yet unclear. Namely, current developments oscillate between seeking ways of embedding these new participatory mechanisms into the decision-making processes and facing the reality of institutional settings in which complex courses of decision-making through a previously established set of procedures complicate the establishment of citizen participation mechanisms.

In general, it is undeniable that digital citizen participation is becoming a trend within contemporary democracies. It has the potential of making representative democracy more inclusive by giving access and tools for citizens to at least voice their preferences towards the representatives in the periods between the elections. Not less important, as described in the examples above, it entails the education of citizens on the concrete procedures of the particular governing processes, which is a new moment in representative democracies. It constitutes a step towards re-empowerment of citizens and thus has the potential of making representative democracy more resilient by restoring the citizens' trust in it.

However, the potential that digital participatory practices have for the invigorating of representative democracies is dependent on their ability to establish mechanisms of embedding citizen participation into governing procedures. Following this, good practice examples which have successfully incorporated participatory mechanisms within institutional frameworks of their local governance are particularly valuable for dissemination. Digital participatory practices analysed in this study function well in this area. The case studies presented can be seen as successful attempts to embed citizen engagement into the existing institutional frameworks. These efforts are faced with a number of decisive points, of which the main ones are effective integration into the existing institutional framework regarding legislative barriers or adaptation of these, simple to use technical infrastructure that clearly states rules of participation and ensures data safety and inclusion of all stakeholders with the highly regulated guidance through the process, while simultaneously maintaining neutrality regarding the content and thus ensuring popular control of agenda-setting. Further, there is the importance of building and maintaining relationships with citizens and key stakeholders and ensuring trust of citizens, related to a demand for the transparency of the process, as well as to the low levels of participation of the general population. The issue of the long-term sustainability of digital participatory practices in terms of the government's commitment in the case of the top-down approach or regarding funding in the case of the bottom-up approach is a notable challenge. There is also a risk inherent in participatory mechanisms in the case when the participatory content suggested by citizens endangers liberal and democratic values such as individual freedoms or protection of minorities. However, the practices analysed here have averted that risk by incorporating the protection of these values into the entrance criteria for participation. It is especially due the fact that digital participatory practices



can have the direct legislative impact that it could be advisable to consider creating regulation of the future digital participatory practices at the EU-level protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, with special emphasis on the minority rights.

Other identified risk is the loss of the participatory element due to the possibility of governmental or non-governmental stakeholders implementing the digital participatory practice to overrule the popular control through their own decisions. This could be prevented by establishing inbuilt mechanisms of protection against this kind of development, such as clear and transparent rules of participation and decision-making procedure. Regarding technological risks inherent in digital practices dealing with private data, the creators and administrators must take all necessary measures to ensure the security of users' personal data and to prevent data breaches and malicious attacks that could result in either system failure or personal data protection failure. The prevention of this includes support and maintenance of accompanying security systems requiring adequate financial and human resources.

To conclude, regarding the rise of the sense of citizen engagement over the years, the cases analysed here constitute innovative attempts at including citizens in the process of governance, with the realization of the majority of democratic goods, and thus their empowerment. It is argued here that already the rise in the agenda-setting possibility on behalf of the citizens, as is the case in the example of ManaBals platform, can produce an opportunity that allows citizens to influence agenda-setting more directly between elections. Lisbon PB is a successful example of the inclusion of citizens in participatory budgeting, which grants citizens co-governing regarding the smaller portion of the city budget, while the Municipality gains the tool to assess the priorities of the local community. These are the kinds of processes that are paving the way for the new vision of representative democracy towards more continuous inclusion of citizens in co-governance between two elections. While these digital participatory practices are still in development and thus do not allow for definite conclusions, due to the realization of most democratic goods, it can be inferred that they do show impact in terms of a stronger sense of engagement of citizens and thus in the fostering of the democratic process.

This study points to the importance of the European Union further exploring and encouraging digital participatory practices that heighten the sense of agency and participation of citizens in democratic governance. In this way citizen engagement can enhance democratic process.



## Policy Recommendations

1. The European Union should facilitate cooperation and partnerships between civil society, government and non-government stakeholders regarding the spread and the creation of the initiatives for digital participatory practices in its member states by establishing the link to its funding mechanisms.
2. The European Union should harness the potential of the already existing good practice examples of digital participatory practices and facilitate their dissemination. Specifically, the EU should facilitate analysing the transfer of the practices and overcoming potential barriers by establishing the link to its funding mechanisms for the dissemination of good practices.
3. Adapting digital participatory practices to different national legislative and institutional frameworks is an area that should be given special attention. This is possible to achieve through the establishment of advisory groups consisting of legal experts and other relevant stakeholders of member states interested in the incorporation of digital participatory practices and stakeholders included in the implementation of particular digital participatory good practice in member states that have successfully implemented these practices.
4. Technical interfaces of the digital participatory practices should be designed in an accessible and functional manner. A highly structured, yet simple and politically neutral process of guidance of citizens and stakeholders through the policy/proposal creations/deliberation and monitoring of the implementation should be established to ensure inclusiveness. Rules of participation for citizens and eligibility criteria for proposals should be clearly stated within the platform, while simultaneously preserving liberal and fundamental EU and democratic values. It should be ensured that the digital participatory practices have a high level of security regarding access and user authentication, as well as data privacy. Development of regulations at the EU-level which ensure these principles to be embedded into digital participatory practices should be considered.
5. In the establishment of the link to financial funds of the EU for creation and regulating of digital participatory practices, special attention should be given to the area of inclusiveness. Following this, the need of the the existence of at least some face-to-face venues for participation, for deliberative and/or informative purposes should be ensured, as well as an extensive process of communicating benefits of digital participation to the citizens, to address the inclusiveness of the digital participatory practice and engage the traditionally disengaged social groups, such as elderly or participants with lower educational background.



6. Monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of policies or projects decided on in a participatory manner should be incorporated upon the creation of new participatory practices, to ensure transparency of the process and foster the visibility of the impact of citizen engagement. Following this, it is suggested that this monitoring mechanism be contained in any future project of digital participation.
  
7. The process of digital participatory practices should be evaluated regularly, while the results of the evaluation should be publicly available and used for the enhancement of the subsequent process of the digital participatory practices.



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