

Ramp up ambition or a leap into the void: The Conference on the Future of Europe and the participatory democracy challenge.

EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY: THE REQUIRED INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

RAMP UP AMBITION OR A LEAP INTO THE VOID: THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE AND THE PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY CHALLENGE.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper delves into the heart of the academic and policy debate surrounding the democratic deficit and participatory democracy within the EU. A combination of bibliometric and text analysis is used to shed light on the complexities of the EU's democratic landscape and highlight the recent efforts undertaken to ensure its legitimacy, responsiveness, and effectiveness. Particular attention is placed on the discourses before and after the Conference on the Future of Europe, which brought into focus the differing interests of EU institutions and individual member states. The outcomes of this analysis propose a framework to further integrate e-participation into the current EU participatory framework through the combination of online and offline instruments.

Social Media summary

The Conference on the Future of Europe brought to the attention of the public eye the divergent views of EU institutions and member states on the involvement of citizens in European decision-making processes. A coordinated European E-participation infrastructure might be one among the possible solutions to shorten the democratic deficit in Europe.

Keywords

#participatory democracy #democratic deficit #e-participation

Short bio

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TABLE OF ACRONYMS

EU - European Union
COFOE - The Conference on the Future of Europe
TEU - Treaty of the European Union
ECI - European Citizens' Initiative
PC - Public consultations
MDP - Multilingual Digital Platform
NCPs - National citizens' panels
ECPs - European Citizens' Panels

INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU), a remarkable democratic experiment has been considered to have suffered from a substantial legitimacy crisis since its inception. The essence of democracy depends on the associated growing democratic expectations on institutional design and political competition but, also, on informed and effective participation by citizens (Longo, 2019; Belluati, 2021). Among the central discussions that have captured the attention of EU scholars, policymakers, and the general public, the concepts of "democratic deficit" and "participatory democracy" stand as prominent markers of the EU's evolving nature and governance.

The concept of the *democratic deficit* originated in discussions about the political integration of the European Union reflects the concerns about the perceived gap between the authority held by its institutions and the direct influence exercised by its citizens. Many argue that decision-making processes within the EU may lack the level of transparency, accountability and democratic representation found in traditional national democracies (Hoeksma, 2022). Over the years, these discussions have evolved to include an examination of perceived shortcomings in the representative and participatory aspects of European institutions (Abels, 2009; Itzcovich, 2023) prompting a closer scrutiny of how these institutions engage with and reflect the interests of the people they serve.

In this context, the perspective of participatory democracy is particularly relevant in the debate on the democratic deficit in Europe. It emphasises the active involvement of citizens in the decision-making processes of governance, calling for a broader and more direct engagement of citizens. However, up to today no means or attempt at reform has been developed at EU level to develop an infrastructure of participation that is clearly visible, coherent, comprehensive, and effective.

The Conference on the Future of Europe (COFOE), which took place between April 2021 and May 2022, addressed participatory democracy and democratic deficit as two faces of the same coin in the discussions about how to ensure effective and legitimate governance within the European Union (MARCU, 2022). The COFOE, an unprecedented exercise in transnational deliberative democratic participation, was the first initiative to include EU citizens in deliberations about the EU's key challenges and priorities for the future (Maurice, 2022). It brought together the European institutions, European stakeholders, and citizen representatives of almost

five hundred million citizens from 27 countries to express their views on the future of Europe.

The narrative behind COFOE's participatory model finds its expression in previous attempts at reforming the European Union, such as the failed Constitutional Treaty, which attempted to establish a constitution for Europe but it was rejected, and The Lisbon Treaty, which introduced elements related to transparency, civil society dialogue, and participatory tools through the new Article 11 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) (Eurmove, 2020; Alemanno, 2021). The Conference on the Future of Europe's nature was also permeated by the idea of *deliberative democracy*, according to which political decisions should not only integrate citizen inputs but also be shaped by reasonable discussions among citizens (European Committee on Democracy and Governance, 2023).

The range of participatory channels currently available in the EU is not intended to have a direct impact on the decision-making process, but rather to legitimize existing political priorities and policy approaches. On the contrary, the COFOE proved the potential to further integrate online and offline participatory instruments potential to build and strengthen representative democracy. Digital communication technologies have advanced and become effective tools of democratic participation, offering new avenues for citizens to have their voices heard and influence policy outcomes (Seubert, 2023).

This paper delves into the heart of the academic and policy debate surrounding the democratic deficit and participatory democracy within the EU. A combination of bibliometric and text analysis is used to shed light on the complexities of the EU's democratic landscape and highlights the recent efforts undertaken to ensure its legitimacy, responsiveness, and effectiveness. Particular attention is placed on the discourses before and after the Conference on the Future of Europe, which brought into focus the differing interests of EU institutions and individual member states. E-participation is also discussed as an effective way to support democratic decision-making processes. This approach aims to underscore the primary challenges confronting European institutions and to accentuate the key points of contention. The outcome of this analysis proposes a framework to further integrate e-participation into the current EU participatory framework, through the combination of online and offline instruments.

THE DEBATE ABOUT DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE.

In this paragraph, a combination of bibliographic and text analysis has been adopted to find hidden patterns, associations, and structures within the academic and policy discussions in preparation for and following the COFOE event (see Annex). Officially announced by the Joint Declaration co-signed by the Parliament, the Commission and the Council in March 2021, the conference bears all the promises to become a key democratic step on the path towards fostering a genuine transnational space for participatory democracy (Dobler, 2020). The unprecedented engagement of so many diverse participants (citizens, politicians, and stakeholders) in deliberations regarding the future of Europe, as well as its unique nature attempting to combine features of bottom-up participatory democracy with elements of top-down elite decision-making, contributed to shaping a greater enthusiasm for a deeper reform of the EU.

It was an attempt to incorporate three different institutional visions: Parliament, Council, and Commission visions. (Von Ondarza and Ålander, 2021; Mavrouli and Van Waeyenberge, 2023). The European Parliament was the first body to take a position mentioning the importance of the COFOE in advancing integration at a deeper level, by involving citizens and youth, with the specific mandate to influence legislative initiatives for arriving at treaty reform (European Parliament, 2020b, 2020a). The Commission followed by addressing the need to attract citizens to the EU's new political drive, to see their efforts and participation transformed into concrete political recommendations and actions (European Commission, 2020). The Council of the EU was the last to express its position, arguing that the COFOE was an opportunity for citizens to express themselves (Council of the EU), but not a tool for citizens' active participation in EU decision-making, limiting the debate to the implementation of the EU Strategic Agenda agreed for 2019–2024 (Council of the European Union, 2020, 2021).

The preparatory stage not only revealed diverging positions of the institutions (Figure 1), but also reflected the differences among the EU's member states regarding the scope and ambition of the Conference (Ålander, Von Ondarza and Russack, 2021). Some countries (France, Italy, Spain) were in favour of a more integrated and democratic EU, including the revision of EU treaties. A group of twelve member states (i.e., Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland,

Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Sweden) indicated their intention to rule out treaty amendments as the ultimate result of the Conference on the Future of Europe. These member states expressed their preference to abstain from generating legal obligations for states and from intervening in established legislative processes.

Both Member states and institutions had also greatly heterogeneous preferences when it came to policy fields. Initial debates under the umbrella of the Conference were focused on policies and political priorities for EU action. The scope of the debate about the COFOE's nature addressed political priorities, mainly of transnational nature, such as security, border, migration, trade and European values. The debate progressed about how desirable policy objectives should depend on changes to the competencies, resources, powers, and procedures of the EU to ensure the Union has the capacity to deliver on them. However, it also highlighted institutional issues like the EU's democratic foundations, the EU's ability to deliver on policy priorities, subsidiarity, proportionality, transparency and the enforcement of the EU *acquis* (Fabbrini, 2020).

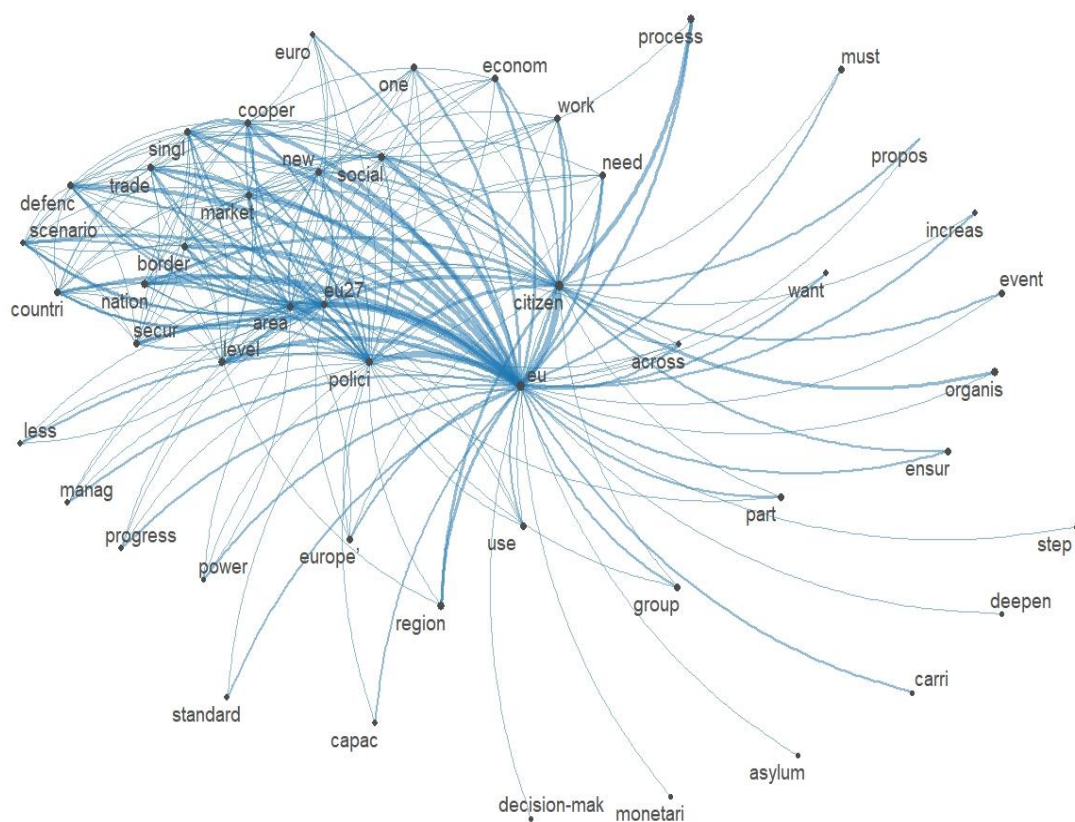


Figure 1: An analysis of the co-occurrence about the main terms found in preparatory institutional COFOE documents.

Source: Author's elaboration using Quanteda Package.

The analysis of the policy documents following the end of the COFOE were permeated by a different spirit compared to the initial one (Figure 2). The unprecedented involvement of citizens, politicians and stakeholders in the COFOE boosted and reinvigorated the appetite for deliberation, engagement and representativeness at European level (Mavrouli and Van Waeyenberge, 2023). The outcomes of the COFOE have been characterized by a renewed sense of democratic legitimacy and policy cohesion, stemming from increased engagement of citizens in European political matters, as well as an increased level of cooperation and integration among EU member states.

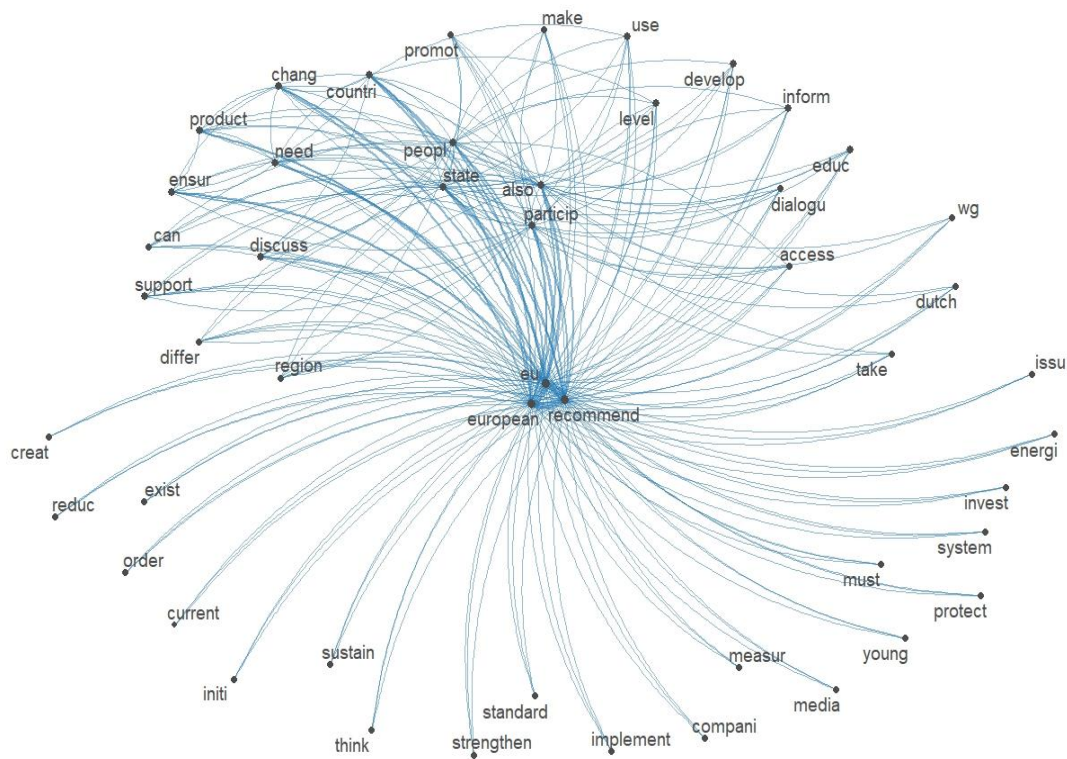


Figure 2: An analysis of the co-occurrence on the main terms found in post COFOE institutional documents.

Source: Author's elaboration using Quanteda Package.

The reactions of the three main EU institutions to the Conference on the Future of Europe have been mixed and not completely aligned (Emmanouilidis, 2022). The EP called for the initiation of the ordinary revision procedure (Article 48 Treaty on the European Union (TEU)). The Commission committed itself to propose ways to ensure citizens are given a “closer role in EU policymaking” (The European Commission, 2022). The Council committed to responding to citizens’ concerns and to take concrete steps towards implementing the Conference’s proposals, but within the current treaty framework (European Union, 2023).

The collective reaction of the EU27 to the Conference's outcomes have been also very different. As in the proceedings of the COFOES, two main blocks emerged at the end. The Nordic and Baltic states, as well as Central and Eastern European member states opposed the interpretation of the European Parliament stressing the need for treaty amendments. On the other hand, the group of old Western European states, which represent the main population in Europe, argued for reforms also including the option of treaty amendments.

All in all, the outcome of the COFOE empowers the motivations of supporters of stronger interaction between EU institutions and citizens to be enhanced through digital and more accessible language. The internet and social media might allow for a broader participation of the civil society and new groups of citizens, such as the young (Deželan, 2023). In the next paragraph, we provide an overview of existing participatory instruments, and we highlight the potential of e-participation as a mean to strengthen participatory democracy.

THE EUROPEAN PARTICIPATORY INSTRUMENTS AND THE ROLE OF E-PARTICIPATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES.

Participatory democracy has been a topic of discussion since the beginning of European integration, but it was only with the Treaty of Lisbon (Article 11) that its role was formally recognized. Today, the European Union provides a wide array of participatory opportunities for its citizens (Table 1), to potentially engage with and to influence EU decision-making at different stages of the policy cycle (Russack, 2018). These participatory mechanisms encompass various elements, including tools for setting agendas, such as submitting petitions to the European Parliament through the European Citizen Initiative (ECI), avenues for contributing to policy formation, like participating in public consultations on new initiatives. Additionally, they encompass a range of administrative actions, such as filing requests for access to documents from EU institutions, registering complaints with the European Ombudsman and the Commission, and most notably, the ECI (Alemanno, 2022).

Table 1: The main EU participation instruments: function, strengths and shortcomings.
Source: Adapted by Hierlemann et al.,(2022).

Citizens' Dialogues	
Function	Town-hall meetings organised by the European Commission where citizens can talk directly with Commissioners or other EU officials.
Strengths	Inclusive participation requires minimal expertise or effort. Events often coincide with Commission visits, facilitating face-to-face interactions and immediate feedback, adding a personal touch to the participatory system.
Shortcomings	Dialogues lack formal translation of citizens' ideas into policy. In practice, they attract a pro-EU, educated audience, limiting diversity, and the Q&A format offers limited deliberation.
European Citizens' Consultations	
Function	Town-hall meetings organised by the European Commission where citizens can talk directly with Commissioners or other EU officials.
Strengths	The EU is giving greater attention to innovative citizen participation in decision-making, which has influenced the Conference on the Future of Europe, emphasizing deliberation and citizens' input over politicians' views in all events.
Shortcomings	Member states had diverse processes, not all were engaged, and varying formats hindered common conclusions and brand awareness, despite targeting the European Council summit, resulting in minimal discussion and follow-up.
European Citizens' Initiative	
Function	An instrument enabling an initiative by at least one million EU citizens to call upon the European Commission to propose legislation
Strengths	This instrument has expanded the European political agenda, fostering cross-border collaboration among citizens and simplifying the initiation of citizens' initiatives.
Shortcomings	The EU instrument is largely unknown among citizens, digital campaigning is restricted for organizers, and the outcomes of 'successful' initiatives often disappoint organizers, leading to a lack of success stories.
European Ombudsman	
Function	An independent EU institution that investigates complaints about maladministration by EU institutions or other EU bodies, lodged by EU citizens and residents or undertaken on its own account.
Strengths	The European Ombudsman's impact has grown through engaged leadership. Complaint submission is user-friendly, with efforts to further reduce barriers, enhancing EU public administration's citizen-centricity and responsiveness.
Shortcomings	The European Ombudsman's role is not well-known outside the EU, and communication with citizens is limited. Compliance with Ombudsman inquiries decreases for politically sensitive matters.
European Parliament elections	
Function	Direct and EU-wide elections of Members of the European Parliament by the EU's citizenry.
Strengths	EU elections unify citizens in collective voting, reinforcing decision-making legitimacy through formal representation within EU institutions. Debates also turn more European, addressing emerging cross-border issues.
Shortcomings	EU elections resemble 27 national elections, with reform proposals for democratic legitimacy stalled, and linking election results to policies proving challenging due to complex EU decision-making and the Parliament's limited powers.
Petitions to the European	
Function	The right of any EU citizen or EU resident to submit a petition to the European Parliament that comes within the European Union's fields of activity, and which affects them directly
Strengths	Any EU citizen or resident can petition the Parliament with minimal requirements, and approximately 200 petitioners are invited annually to present and discuss their petitions in the Committee. This process helps the Parliament connect with the real-world application of EU law beyond the 'EU bubble.'
Shortcomings	The Committee has a low profile, lacks public engagement efforts, and faces a shortage of political will and resources, limiting the impact of petitions.
Public consultation	
Function	Public consultations organised by the European Commission online, inviting citizens and stakeholders to provide feedback on EU policy at various stages.
Strengths	EU policymaking includes consultations for each proposal, theoretically open to all with internet access, enabling communication by the Commission during input gathering.
Shortcomings	Resource-intensive response processing leads to delays. Limited language availability in consultations favours multilingual citizens. Consultation results, while often non-representative, are occasionally presented as decisive.

However, the current EU participatory framework, apart from being hardly known, lacks visibility, performance and political will. The available instruments provide citizens with a limited power of influence and supervision over the decision-making process. On the contrary, an inclusive and participatory organization requires continuous reflection on how institutions can support bottom-up efforts with the appropriate tools, funding and constructive engagement (Conference on the Future of Europe Observatory, 2022).

To address the perceived remoteness and hierarchical nature of European institutions, it is necessary to further develop, expand, and enhance both existing and new participatory mechanisms (Marxsen, 2015). The application of advanced technologies, such as the Internet of Things, blockchain, big data analytics and augmented reality, has the potential to increase the visibility and effectiveness of current instruments. These means can introduce old tools to new audiences, but they can also be used to engage citizens more actively in democratic processes.

The use of digital technologies and online platforms to engage citizens, stakeholders, and the public in the decision-making and democratic processes is called “electronic participation” (e-Participation). It is a subset of an umbrella term defined as “*electronic democracy*” (*e-democracy*), which is defined as the use of Information and Communication Technologies to support the democratic decision-making processes (Lironi, 2016).

The use of information and communication technologies to broaden and deepen political participation, as well as to support the democratic decision-making processes offers new opportunities to connect citizens with one another and with their elected representatives. The term ‘e-participation’ suffers from a lack of an all-inclusive definition, but it encompasses various interactions between governments and citizens that can be identified in the terms: e-information, e-consultation and e-decision-making (Figure 3).

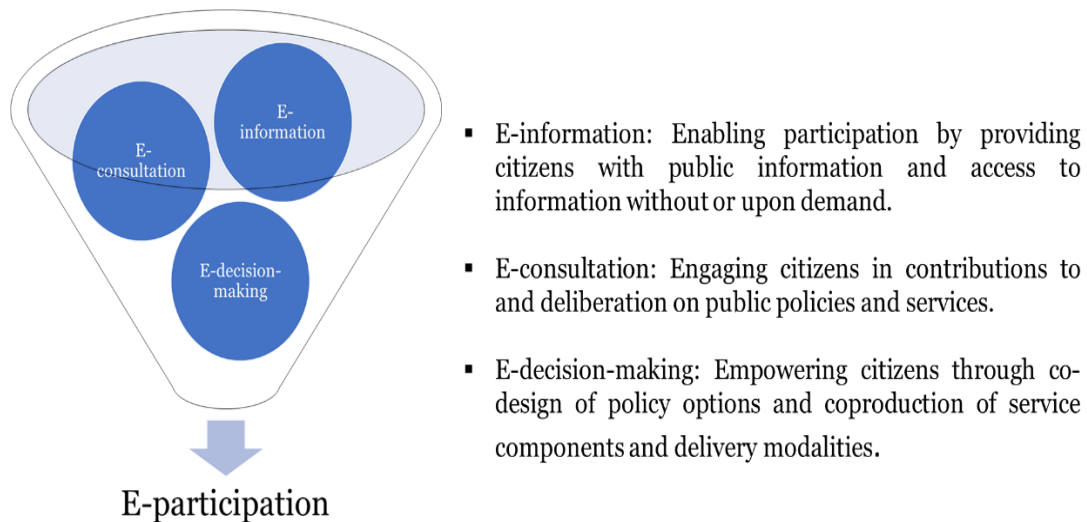


Figure 3: Conceptual framework for e-participation including the concepts of e-information, e-consultation and e-decision making.

Source: Adapted from United Nations (2014)

The case of the COFOE, which used innovative formats and covered pressing issues in different policy fields, stands as an emblematic instance of e-participation (European Commission, 2021). Its hybrid framework, characterized by online and face-to-face mechanisms including a Multilingual Digital Platform (MDP), decentralized national citizens' panels (NCPs) and European Citizens' Panels (ECPs), conferred to the Conference an experimental nature, going beyond prior models of technocratic or deliberative constitutional change (Conference on the Future of Europe, 2022). The MDP, an interactive tool enabling citizens and other stakeholders to share and debate ideas for the future of the EU, kept always ensured the accessibility and transparency of the proceedings. The six NCPs and four ECPs, composed of EU citizens randomly selected, to which were assigned the responsibility of deliberating on a range of topics previously identified through the Multilingual Digital Platform, ensured its unprecedented participative and inclusive nature. However, together with the other e-participation tools (also including the European Citizens' Initiative, online EU public consultations and petitions to the European Parliament), its implementation still present several challenges to promote a simple and transparent engagement with the EU institutions (Nielsen *et al.*, 2020).

The major challenges to e-participation, at the European level, are the lack of legitimacy of the approach for policymakers or citizens, the deficiency of capacity, the need for highly specialised expertise and the difficulties in implementing

participatory processes as part of the process of policy design, often hampered by a lack of accountability and transparency. These obstacles can be gradually overcome by developing a coordinated European E-participation Infrastructure, involving multiple actors, different institutions and services with the aim of opening up European decision-making. First, it would be beneficial to enhance parallel efforts in different parts of the EU institutional system, to enhance common opportunities for participation into a user-friendly platform. This can help to keep development focused on real-world usefulness, as a unified form of access and a homogenous user experience. Second, it would probably be advantageous to also support formal and informal dialogue and consultation among citizens and decision-makers, to build momentum around European citizens' initiatives, and direct citizens to participate in consultations. By harnessing input from both online and offline consultations and leveraging initiatives, such as those developed through the COFOE, the integration of evidence gathering, interest negotiation, and democratic dialogue in a structured and transparent manner can contribute to enhance both input and output legitimacy (Nielsen *et al.*, 2020). Third, the question of social media's impact and relevance for political communication and democracy might also heighten the interest in the interplay of politics and the use of social media for political purposes (Korthagen *et al.*, 2018). The utilization of social media is on the rise and it is emerging as a robust and powerful tool to connect individuals and groups in online environments, fostering diversity and creating platforms for opinion formation that exist separately from established institutions (Lindner and Aichholzer, 2020).

All in all, e-participation adds new ways of communication among citizens and between actors of representative democracy and their constituencies, also affecting the modes and conditions of offline political processes. However, whether and how these instruments might efficiently influence the actual policymaking process depends on the characteristics of the organization and process. The main challenges and concerns that e-participation faces today mirror those identified in the context of participation, in general, such as elite capture of participatory processes, lack of voice for marginalised groups and absence of capacity in public administration to manage participatory processes. To overcome these issues, e-participation should not stand alone, but it should be carefully incorporated and framed in the existing governance organizational and procedural system.

CONCLUSIONS

The shortcomings inherent in EU representative democracy have spurred efforts to advocate for alternative discourse on democracy, aiming to address certain deficiencies observed in liberal representative democracy and place people and democratic politics at the forefront of the political process (Quintas, 2015). The Union has expanded its participatory scope considerably over time, but no new instrument has led to the development of a visible, coherent, comprehensive, and effective participation infrastructure.

The Conference on the Future of Europe represented a pioneering supranational endeavour in deliberative democracy and presented an inventive solution to tackle apprehensions regarding the European Union's democratic shortfall (Berke *et al.*, 2023). The conference proposals on participatory and deliberative democracy highlighted the opportunities for citizens, especially young people, to play a more active role in decision-making on theme-specific issues and to monitor the overarching direction of EU integration (Youngs, 2022). It can be interpreted as an effort not just to strengthen the citizens' voice but also to encourage institutions to pay heed to and to engage with citizens actively.

The existing participatory instruments are barely known by citizens that often feel themselves underrepresented and not properly engaged in European policy-decision making processes. This opens the way to a new participatory framework based on an enhanced integration of on-line and offline procedures, which can enhance the visibility and effectiveness of old and new participatory mechanisms. E-participation is seen as a possible solution for democratic shortcomings at the European level and it has been progressively recast as a component of participation. Nevertheless, there still seems to be very little concrete appreciation and knowledge among national and European policymakers about their potential added value or how these formats can work in practice.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Deliberative and participatory mechanisms should be put in place with the aim of giving citizens a direct say in the shaping of European legislation and decision making. There is a need of political follow-up to the proceedings and the results of participatory instruments, which would attach political responsibility to identifiable actors. This means empowering people with

the capacity to generate EU-wide public pressure and public awareness about the potential benefits and costs of certain strategic policy decisions, other than to develop concrete policy proposals at the European and (sub)national levels.

Recommendation 2: EU institutions and member states should discuss and develop a shared vision and understanding of the Union's participatory infrastructure, to reflect this on a comprehensive EU participation strategy based on visibility, accessibility, representativeness, transnationality, deliberativeness, and inclusive principles. A key element for transnational discussions engaging the largest possible number of citizens requires a strong online component to be integrated with face-to-face events, provided that the online tool is designed to be accessible to as many citizens as possible. Physical events remain an important complementary tool to online consultations, but these should be targeted to current topics of horizontal interest and should be created to favour a fair and productive communication with EU institutions going beyond the existing consultation mechanisms.

Recommendation 3: The EU needs a joint communication's effort to make the participation infrastructure visible to the wider public and it also requires stronger digital components and new participation formats, such as creation of portals with information on the public agents involved, platforms for online consultation, tools for exercising the right to request online to interact between citizens and its institutions. This implies upholding and promoting the existing e-participation tools, by means of the use of social media to fulfil networking, effective communication and civic education and campaigns. The digitalisation of democracy should also not lead to new forms of inequality or exclusion, and civil rights like privacy in a digital environment should be prioritized.

Recommendation 4: E-participation tools can represent an alternative form of active engagement for citizens if it is ensured a learning and open process for all, including also young people. The creation and development of tools for youth-friendly information-sharing, feedback for media education and digital literacy should be widely supported at European, national and local levels. Beyond this, it is also crucial to establish legal and institutional frameworks that ensure freedom of information, privacy, and data protection, thus guaranteeing a secure environment for e-participation.

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ANNEX

The literature search is completed through the Scopus and Web of Science databases, limiting the search to English sources (Table 2).

Table 2: Query launched in Scopus and Web of Science databases.

(europe OR (conference AND of AND the AND future AND of AND europe) OR cofoe OR cofoe) AND ((democratic AND deficit) OR (participatory AND democracy) OR (inclusive democracy) OR (citizen involvement))

A bibliographic analysis has been conducted by means of the Bibliometrix package (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017), an open-source tool for carrying out a thorough science mapping analysis of scientific sources, to identify, assess, and synthesize the state of the literature on the EU democratic deficit and participatory democracy. The Bibliometrix tool allows to perform multiple correspondence analysis to examine interdependence among a set of categorical variables, aiming to identify new latent variables (Figure 4). The results are interpreted based on the relative positions of the points and their distribution along the dimensions. Keywords approaching the centre point indicate that they have received close attention in recent years and as words are more similar in distribution, the closer they are represented in the map (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017).

Three main clusters can be identified from the analysis. Cluster 1 (red colour) consists of papers discussing the democratic deficit debate in the EU, including topics like the EU's lack of democratic legitimacy, the absence of a common European public sphere and identity (Quintas, 2015; Ronzoni, 2017). Critics often highlight the limits of EU institutions in establishing democratic legitimacy at the supranational level but also the role of Europarties, which face challenges such as political cohesion, activists' engagement, and public visibility issues (Müller, 2022). Cluster 2 (blue colour) deals with democratic governance in Europe, focusing on political participation and decision-making issues due to the transfer of sovereignty to supranational entities. EU's consensual decision making, that is perceived as

distant from citizens' preferences, weakens national parliaments. In addition, new forms of political participation are developing that are redefining the format and basic normative principles of modern democracy. Cluster 3 (green colour) relates to crucial concerns about the lack of spaces of political contestation within the EU, due to a lack of solid institutional narratives addressed to public opinion and an unclear communication towards its citizens that might contribute to fostering a genuine and authentic political debate (Belluati, 2021; Berke *et al.*, 2023). The trust and attitudes of citizens are often neglected in the decision-making process regarding crucial EU policies and its constitutional order (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2017). The Bibliometrix package allows to perform multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) in order to examine interdependence among a set of categorical variables, aiming to identify new latent variables (Figure 4).

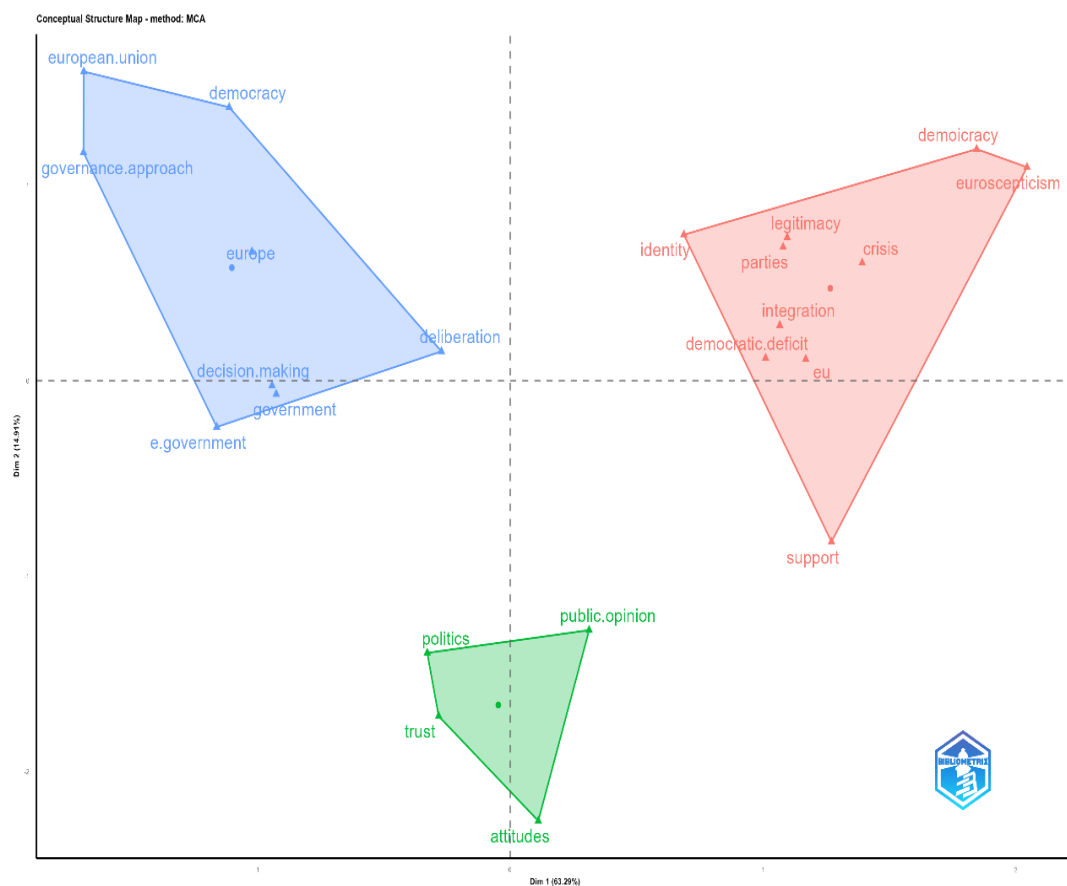


Figure 4: Factorial analysis of conceptual structure map-method: MCA of high-frequency keywords.
Source: Authors' elaboration through Bibliometrix package

The text analysis has been applied on a set of policy documents issued before (11 documents) and after (7 documents) the COFOE from the main European institutions participating to the discussion. The Quanteda package is used to provide

a comprehensive workflow and toolkit for natural language processing tasks such as corpus management, tokenization, analysis, and visualization of a corpus of documents (Benoit *et al.*, 2018). The institutions taken into consideration include: The European Commission, The Council of the EU and European Council, The European Parliament, The European Economic and Social Committee and The European Committee of the Regions. The Quanteda package is used to build the feature co-occurrence matrix based on the tokenization result that is plotted as a network, where edges show co-occurrences of features (Figure 1 and 2). The feature co-occurrence analysis, which can help find the relationships among terms, is one of the most important methods in text mining. Starting from the analysis of institutional documents published before COFOE we can have the opportunity to provide insights into hidden patterns, associations, and structures within the discussions in preparation to the event.