

shortcut



The image shows a Zoom meeting interface. On the left, a grid of 20 video thumbnails shows various participants. On the right, a presentation slide is displayed with the following content:

English	I now understand more about... a) ... the EU. b) ... other countries. c) ... the 3 topics. d) ... other political views.
Dansk	Jeg ved nu mere om... a) ... EU. b) ... andre lande. c) ... de 3 emner. d) ... andre politiske holdninger.
Deutsch	Ich verstehe jetzt mehr über... a) ... die EU. b) ... andere Länder. c) ... die 3 Themen. d) ... andere politische Meinungen.
Italiano	Ora ne so di più riguardo... a) ... l'UE. b) ... altri paesi. c) ... i 3 temi. d) ... altre opinioni politiche.
Lietuviškai	Dabar turiu daugiau žinių apie... a) ... ES. b) ... kitas šalis. c) ... 3 temas. d) ... kitas politines pažiūras.

Transnational Citizens' Dialogues

Making a success of digital citizen participation in multiple languages

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shortcut
What it's all about

Transnational Citizens' Dialogues: An achievement of the digital world

"It was great to meet so many other Europeans. We could talk face-to-face online and create ideas together—that was fascinating," said one of the participants in the Transnational Citizens' Dialogue organised by the EU Commission and Bertelsmann Stiftung. 100 randomly selected citizens from Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Lithuania came together from 27—30 October 2020—in an entirely digital Dialogue.

Citizens from five countries worked together for three days online on Zoom. Supported by moderators and simultaneous translators, they discussed the democratic, digital and green future of Europe in five different languages—each participant speaking his or her own language. They learned from experts, co-created ideas and proposals in transnational groups and discussed them with EU Commissioners Margrethe Vestager and Virginijus Sinkevičius.

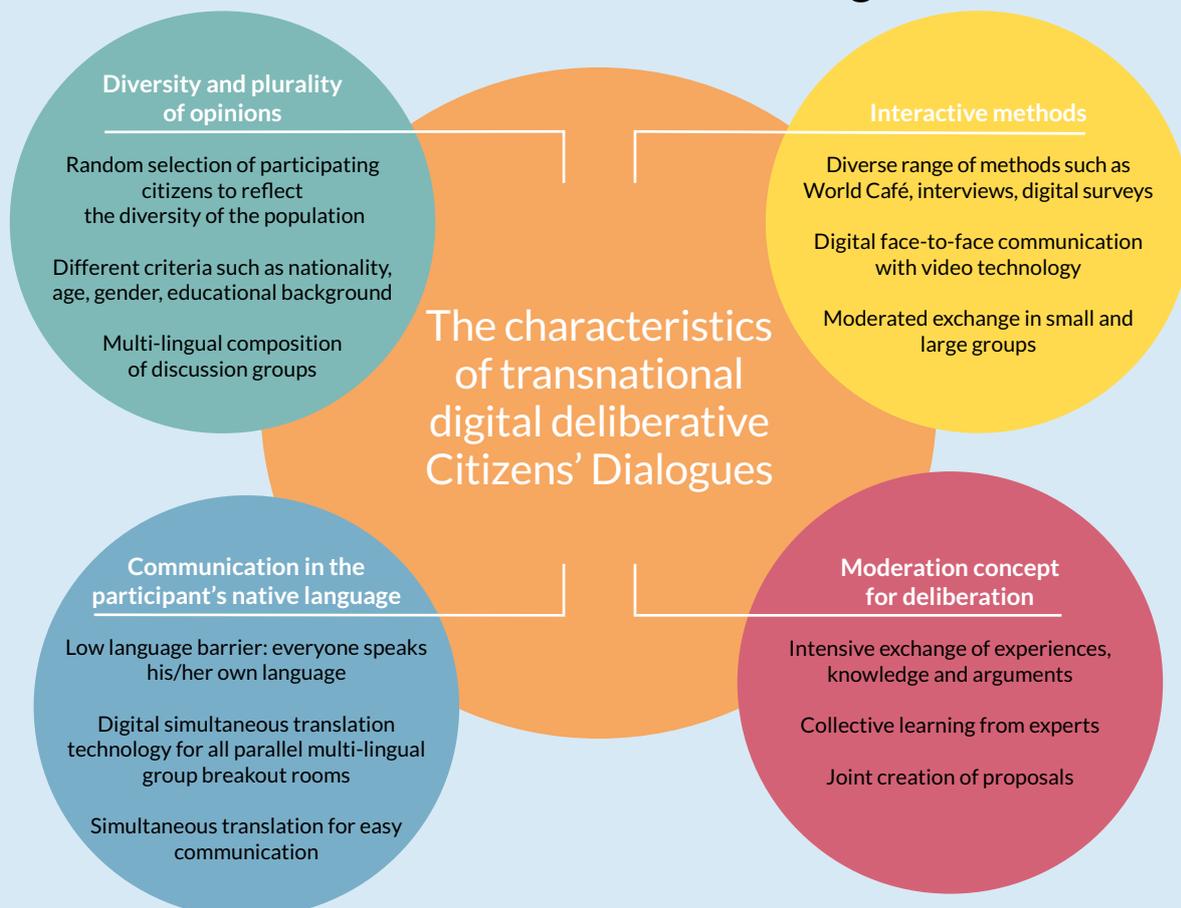
This Citizens' Dialogue is one of a series of dialogues being conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the EU Commission. The object was to test new inclusive, deliberative and transnational formats. The project clearly proves that European participation formats with citizens of all EU Member States are possible, both physically and digitally.

This issue of *shortcut* shows how transnational digital citizen participation in multiple languages works.



shortcut
How it works

The characteristics of transnational digital deliberative Citizens' Dialogues



The “Making of” story: Organisation of a transnational digital dialogue

- 1. Starting random selection in European countries:**
Planning starts at least eight weeks before the event. What mix of participants should there be? Which countries with which languages should be represented? Are there recruitment service providers in all countries? Participants are given practical advice and a digital training course.
- 2. Combining online technology with the translation tool:**
A translation tool was docked onto the video tool (Zoom) for the dialogue. There are multiple languages not only in the plenum discussion, but also in the groups taking place at the same time. Multilingual surveys for plenum and small groups are also integrated.
- 3. Clarifying roles:**
The respective roles for all involved must be clearly defined. Technicians are in charge of the links between the video and translation tools. They permanently monitor the technology in every individual group, as well as providing telephone hotline support. Every group has its own translators and moderators. A detailed moderation and technology concept guarantees the transparency of interactions and the timeframe.
- 4. Conducting training and rehearsals:**
Nothing is done without test runs. Special training sessions for translators and moderators, and several rehearsals for all concerned, ensure that all are qualified to carry out their own specific role.

Our advice is: Be patient and keep calm!

shortcut Good to know:

Five factors to ensure high-quality discussions and results

- 1. Diversity of participants:** Differences in knowledge, experiences and opinions introduce different viewpoints to—and enrich—the discussion.
- 2. Communication in participants’ native languages:** Simultaneous translation in the (small) digital group rooms allows the participants to communicate and conduct in-depth discussions with one another easily and without language barriers. The process supports structured dialogues, as it promotes discipline and mutual respect.
- 3. Structure and variety:** Clearly structured procedures offer all participants good orientation. They ensure co-creative, targeted work and guarantee that the final result is a joint effort. A high level of concentration is guaranteed by short and varied contributions, diverse methods that encourage the interaction and activation of all participants, and short breaks.
- 4. Moderation and consensus:** Professional moderators ensure adherence to the basic structure, a fair and equal say for everyone, and discussions that are conducted with mutual respect and fairness. This allows everyone to contribute while ensuring that the discussion remains focused on the co-creation of mutually agreed proposals.
- 5. Expert knowledge and information:** Experts accompany the event live and online to support the citizens. Fact-based information from the experts supplements the knowledge of participants and objectivises the discussions. The experts help to weigh up pros and cons, ensuring that convincing arguments and proposals prevail.

Transnational Citizens' Dialogues strengthen democracy in the EU

The EU offers very few opportunities for citizens to participate in and shape policymaking. EU institutions consult stakeholder groups, civic organisations and associations on a regular basis, whereas the interests, thoughts and ideas of “average” EU citizens are mostly excluded.

In this respect, transnational Citizens' Dialogues open up new possibilities. Citizens from different European countries are given a common voice. They address their jointly formulated proposals on European topics directly to European policymakers. Although Citizens' Dialogues are only advisory in nature, they offer policymakers valuable additional perspectives.

Deliberative and transnational Citizens' Dialogues counteract polarised political debate and the populist promotion of simple solutions. Their transnational character and consensus-oriented discussions highlight European topics in a differentiated way. They focus on diversity of perspective, factual information and objective arguments.

European topics demand European debates—which includes debates between EU citizens from different EU countries

Just as local debate is required for local issues and national debate for national issues, European topics require European debates. It is standard practice for European politicians to discuss the shaping of Europe with their counterparts from other Member States. By the same token, European citizens should also be given the time and space to discuss transnational issues with one another. Transnational citizens' debates are not simply the sum of all purely national debates. Indeed, it is the exchange of ideas between Europeans that will ultimately lead to collective ideas and solutions that are genuinely European.

Europe needs modern citizen participation formats. Transnational digital Citizens' Dialogues are valuable, but we need to improve the integration of new formats into political decision-making processes.



shortcut **More on the subject**

Transnational Citizens' Dialogues. What are the benefits?

Evaluations have shown that transnational Citizens' Dialogues raise citizens' awareness and understanding of Europe. Europeans gain first-hand insight into the viewpoints of other Europeans. There is a positive shift in their attitude towards European politics and policymaking. Their proposals for policy-making are more than just the sum of individual opinions. The primary focus is on achieving mutually agreed European solutions. This is an opportunity for policymakers to gain direct, first-hand knowledge of what ordinary Europeans who represent the diversity of European society consider important.

The European institutions have announced that there will be a “Conference on the Future of Europe”. Citizens from all over Europe will be involved to an unprecedented extent. The approach of the conference must be genuinely European. Digital and transnational exchange formats are merely the first steps in the development of a new architecture of participation in the EU.

Sources and further reading

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The future of democracy



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