

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY VERSION

FEASIBILITY STUDY on a European Citizens' Debate

Brussels/Berlin
January 2006

This Feasibility Study was written in January 2006. Since then, the methodology for a European Citizens' Debate and the design for the European Citizens' Consultations were developed. This document reflects our thinking en route to the Europeans Citizens' Consultations design. To learn more about the project, please refer to the website www.european-citizens-consultations.eu.

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The full version of the study contains detailed analyses of the requirements and features of the Summits, step-by-step descriptions of the events, cost allocations and a mapping of relevant European and national players.

You can request the full version of this study by contacting Gerrit Rauws.

Challenges: The three T's

TRUST It did not take the two failed referenda in France and in the Netherlands to prove that Europe is stalled in a crisis of confidence. The subsequent discussions and analysis of the citizens' reasons for rejection establish two truths: there is no quick fix for the disconnect between Europe and its citizens and more of the same advertising for Europe will not do. Citizens are in their majority not emotionally connected to Europe because Europe does not stand for the issues that are close to their lives. The current and especially the next generation of Europeans will need new visions and rationales of Europe that are more relevant to them. Unless they find those, their support will erode further – and national politicians will continue to benefit from the “blame game” of associating Europe with everything that goes wrong in their countries. Also, without appropriate substance, traditional PR and advertising have neither direction nor impact and are likely to achieve nothing at best.

TIMING Many European and national decision-makers have understood and accepted the challenge of reconnecting Europe with its citizens. Commission Vice-President Margot Wallström's new communication strategy, “Plan D”, puts content first and calls for innovative models for citizen's communication. In the current climate of lacking public support for a new and stronger mandate for the European institutions, however, the interests of national decision-makers are unlikely to converge and provide the basis for a popularly supported consensus. In order to get a second chance for the Constitution, public opinion needs to shift. This is not a matter of explaining Europe but of working with citizens to reconstitute their support for what Europe is about. Therefore, 2006 is the decisive year to tackle this challenge.

TRANSFORMATION If 2006 is the year to start this work, the next question is: When will it be finished? The honest answer is: Never. Unlike the campaign for the introduction of the Euro, the process that needs to start now has no definite end point. For a long time, most European institutions have exclusively worked with a small range of Brussels-based stakeholders and have rarely addressed citizens directly. Where they have done it, communication was one-way with citizens in the role of consumers. Europe, however, is not a product to be sold to customers. Citizenship is a concept that requires more than a yes/no answer. And many citizens are prepared to give more, experience from projects such as “Meeting of Minds” shows. What Europe does need, is a renewal in the way its institutions interact with citizens – from explaining themselves towards working with citizens to establish a stronger foundation of shared priorities.

For all these reasons, this study proposes annual European Citizens' Summits. These summits are designed to involve unprecedented numbers of citizens directly in a carefully managed two-way dialogue on the future of Europe. Starting in 2006, they will form a key component in a strategy that aims at transforming public opinion in order to provide a sufficient basis of support for the institutional decisions that lie directly ahead. Held annually, they will pioneer a long-term change in the way European institutions communicate with their citizens – not as a form of direct democracy but as the basis for a more vibrant and constructive relationship.

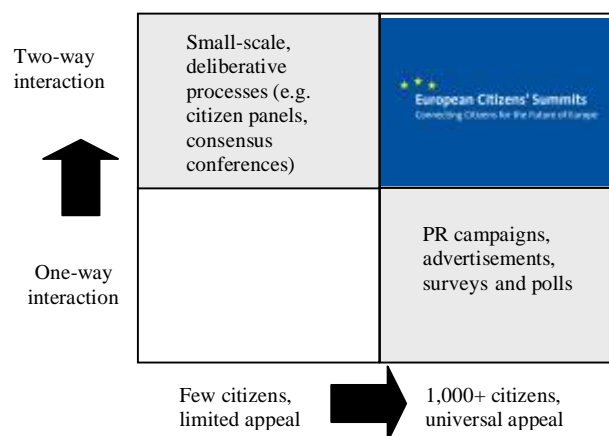
Goals: Connect Citizens to Their Europe

Connecting Citizens	Supporting Decision Makers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring to the surface a genuine interest of citizens in the EU and turn them into active multipliers. • Build up a positive emotional connection of citizens with the EU. • Raise confidence in EU institutions and policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ideas for policy areas and a strong basis for EU communication. • Establish a superior source of information on citizens' views and values. • Improve the image of the EU and its decision makers among citizens.

The Summits will provide a space to address citizens intellectually and emotionally in a format that corresponds to their expectations of transparency, outreach, impact and accountability. **They cannot and do not aim at replacing existing decision-making bodies and forms of political representation.**

Requirements: Learning from and Going Beyond Past Efforts

In order to reach their goals, the Summits will have to combine the large scope and broad appeal of traditional communication formats but transform them from one-way communication tools to genuine two-way dialogues as envisaged by Plan D. Similarly, the Summits have to maintain the deliberative quality and the emotional and intellectual experience of established deliberative formats and bring them to an unprecedented scale.



Learning from past communication projects: A thorough analysis of the major citizen communication efforts by the European Commission and other EU actors reveals six requirements for a successful and sustainable new citizen communication process:

Shortcomings of Past Projects	Requirements for the Summits	Success Factors from Best Practice Examples
Narrow scope	Unprecedented Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior organisational and technical skills and experiences • Innovative large-scale facilitation methods • Network of local implementation supporters

Lack of cross-national exchange	True European Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement from citizens of all EU Member States • Deliberation across language barriers • Emotional and intellectual stimulation
Little relevance of debates for policy-making	Meaningful Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tangible issues with European relevance • Avoid paralleling or substituting on-going debates in formal decision-making bodies
Citizens as mere listeners	Empowerment of Citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness towards the diversity of participants, their preferences and values • Combination of table discussion and plenary • Design for ownership and responsibility
Lack of Follow-Up	Accountable Follow-Up Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous integration of decision-makers • Transparency of follow-up process
Expensive	Efficient Use of Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and leverage overlaps with, e.g., Action Plan, Plan D, White Book • Identify synergies with existing EU communication structures, e.g., Representations of the Commission to the Member States, InfoPoints etc.

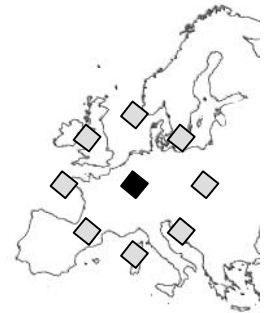
Design: Implementation Options for Large-Scale European Debates

Considering the thoughts elaborated on in the above sections, several options were developed, discussed and evaluated before a decision was taken on a specific model of European Citizens' Summits. The following section gives an overview of the three main options considered.

Three Options

Option 1: European Citizens' Deliberation with a "Plus"

Citizens meet in consecutive bottom-up dialogues that culminate in a central European conference in Brussels. It follows the principles of the European Citizens' Deliberation model, i.e. stage moderation, moderated table discussion and electronic voting, with the "plus" of linking/networking simultaneous events at national level. A delegation of citizens who participated in the national debates is then sent to the final European summit. The methodology (without linking the debates) is field-tested.



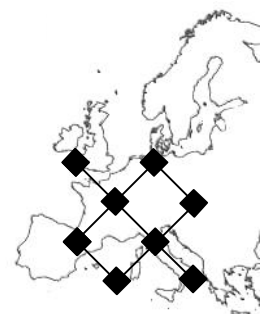
Option 2: European Song Contest

Citizens meet at simultaneous or delayed debates at national level where they select topics to be debated and their "representative" who then joins a central TV-event. The audience present at the TV-show and viewers from home select the "winner" (i.e. the representative with the most convincing argumentation) by TED-vote. This model fits into the current hype of TV- and voting shows and is promising in terms of catching public and media attention.



Option 3: Integrated National Citizens' Summits

Citizens meet at their respective national levels and select and debate a limited number of general and nation-specific pre-defined policy issues. Simultaneousness and technical cross-linking of debates ensure a real-time, instant effect and make cross-location dialogue and analysis possible. The results of the intermediary synthesis are made available to all national levels and are subsequently voted upon. This model allows for broad participation in terms of scale and in-existent language barriers and for a debate about topics of national concern.



Choosing the Right Approach

The three options were evaluated based on the requirements for a successful project laid out in the requirements section above, namely large scale, ‘feeling European’, true dialogue and meaningful interaction, appropriate content, efficient use of resources. The sixth requirement, i.e. accountable follow-up, has been deliberately excluded from this table as it has to be ensured through a process that is independent of the option considered.

	ECD+	European Song Contest	Integrated National Citizens’ Summits
Large scale	✗	✓	✓
‘Feeling European’	✓	~	~
Appropriate content	✓	✗	✓
True dialogue and meaningful interaction	✓	✗	✓
Efficient use of resources	✓	✓	✓

The table shows that Integrated National Citizens’ Summits (INCS) are best suited to fulfill the complete range of requirements. The possibility to involve up to 10,000 participants in intense debates at comparably low costs for travelling, lodging and interpretation, makes Integrated National Citizens’ Summits superior to the other options. Only on the factor ‘Feeling-European’, the ECD+ model scores higher as a physical get-together of citizens of all Member States in one European city will produce a stronger emotional connection in comparison to virtual interconnection as proposed by the INCS option.

However, the ECD+ model does not allow for the implementation of large-scale events. Bringing together a large number of citizens from all over Europe in one European city is, due to enormous travelling and lodging expenses, rather impracticable.

The “European Song Contest” model offers the striking advantage of being a truly large-scale event having the potential to involve millions of viewers all over Europe and possibly beyond. Yet, due to the loss of control to the show producers and the limited time of the actual TV-event, it is hard to ensure intense and meaningful debates.

On the basis of the above evaluation, we have opted to integrate the ECD+ and the INCS models into a process that we define and will from now on refer to as “European Citizens’ Summits”. We thereby combine the strenghts of the field-tested ECD+ model with the creative and innovative features of the INCS model. As a result, we come up with a 5-step process of which both models form essential parts but which, as an integrated whole, yields an impact that largely exceeds that of the sum of its parts.