



**Populism and  
Civic Engagement**

## PaCe project at the EuroPCom 2019

Last Thursday, part of the Populism and Civic Engagement 'PaCE' team, including Nadja Nickel and Beth Wiltshire from The Democratic Society and Magnus Josefsson from the City of Reykjavik, Iceland presented the PaCE project as part of an interactive **'Ideas Lab: Discovering innovative forms of citizens engagement against populism.'** at European Public Communication Conference EuroPCom 2019 in Brussels, Belgium.



The entire session was framed around the question 'How can we make our democracy stronger?' and it was introduced as a real time citizen participation simulation, with half of participants discovering the #HomeParliaments experience, with Pulse of Europe and half looking at ways to strengthen democracy and fight populism together with the PaCE team. Both of these projects are looking at the need for developing new methods for engaging citizens about decisions that affect their lives.



Many people across Europe feel they are not heard and they do not have an option to influence decisions that affect their lives, beyond the right to vote in an election. From populist parties that are challenging democracies and claiming to speak for the 'ordinary people' to the decline of traditional people's parties and challenges around the forming of coalition governments - the argument was that democracy in Europe is floundering. Participants

were asked to think about the need for establishing a close link with European citizens as well as countering and responding to populist movements, and how this must remain at the heart of the EU's communication goals.

The part of the session run by PaCE was focused on answering the question "What needs to be done to ensure informed voting?". Key part of the PaCE project is to understand how



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citizen's attitudes towards democracy are shaped across Europe and how they arrive at a specific voting decision. Each person evaluates what information, gathered through e.g. media, social media, interpersonal relations or interactions with political representatives, they can trust before making a voting decision. Some only trust specific sources, some ensure they shape their own opinion through discussions, others combine different types of information.



Participants were split into five groups, with each one nominating a moderator, a notetaker, a timekeeper and a presenter. They were asked to come up with five 'takeaways' to present to the wider group at the end of the session, but were also asked to note down any other aspects of their conversation.

The discussion revolved around innovative new forms of citizen engagement to address populism in the EU, the need to include emotions & values in our communication, but also the responsibilities that come with citizenship.

Each team came back with different takeaways, although there were several themes:

- Access to neutral, objective, non-partisan information was consistently ranked as a priority. However, participants acknowledged that voting decisions have emotional aspects that need to be addressed.
- Tougher stance on disinformation and better prioritisation of transparency. This should include accountability measures and e-tool development for 'fake news' especially for politicians, as well as more strict rules on social media.
- More frequent, meaningful interactions between citizens and politicians to create relationships and mutual understanding.
- Focus on education - not only on specific political or citizenship subjects but also in areas such as critical thinking and media literacy.

PaCE is a Horizon 2020 project funded by the European Commission. For this project, nine different partners across Europe are aiming to understand aspects of populist movements, to build upon the lessons from positive examples of connecting with citizens, and through this play a part in constructing a firmer democratic and institutional foundation for the citizens of Europe.

Find out more about the project on Twitter: @popandce, or at [www.popandce.eu](http://www.popandce.eu)

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