

The G1000 report by the international observers

“As European democracies are in crisis the G1000 shows a way forward.”

To monitor the G1000 citizens' summit a team of 9 international monitors was invited. The group consisted of academics as well as experienced practitioners from the field, all critical thinkers and widely acclaimed experts on issues of political participation. They were present during the entire day of the citizens' summit, during which they received access to all relevant sources and documents. They were given permission to interview participants and talk to the facilitators, experts, volunteers and members of the organizing team. Translation to English was provided to them. They each communicated their impressions to the organisers of the G1000. The following report is a summary of their comments and observations.

Introduction and acknowledgement

As international observers at the G1000 citizens' summit we are thankful for having had the opportunity to follow closely the audacious democratic and deliberative experiment of bringing together several hundreds of people in a deliberative initiative aimed at discussing social and economic issues of great relevance and deciding upon them. It was a unique experience. It was heart-warming and inspiring to see and feel the enthusiasm and true engagement of the participants, volunteers and organisers, and we believe that the initiative has provided nothing less than the 'raw material' for the further development of democracy. We especially thank the initiators of G1000 for having invited us to evaluate this experiment. Throughout our stay we were warmly hosted and smoothly introduced to the G1000 process. Although not all of us had the language skills to follow the debates at the tables directly, we could rely on translation facilities to get acquainted with these debates and, in general, enjoyed the open and transparent spirit of the G1000. This enabled us to draw up the following report. Summarizing our findings, we can state from the outset that our overall impressions are very positive. We have especially appreciated the fact that the G1000 is an independent, non-partisan, inclusive and volunteer project, truly developed from the bottom up by citizens who have a sincere concern about their society, who possess a clear will and a strong vision.

About the participants

One of the most impressive features of the G1000 was the diversity of participants in terms of gender, age, political preferences as well as social, professional and cultural background. We were also impressed by the inclusion of diverse faith communities and the fair representation of Belgium's different language communities. All the participants whom we interviewed stated that they were honoured to be able to be part of this democratic intervention; many even felt that it was high time for a new type of democracy in Belgium. We experienced an overwhelming positive atmosphere among the participants who also expressed a strong believe in their ability to come up with workable policy recommendations. Participants found that the topics, proposals and decisions reached at

their table were well clustered by the central desk and that the summary in the plenary clearly reflected their debates. It will be interesting to see whether the table facilitators can validate these impressions. Due to the very tight time schedule, some participants felt that they needed more time for reflection - discussions at the tables sometimes had to be conducted in a hasty manner. The work of the table facilitators was evaluated very positively, especially their ability to ensure respectful and focussed discussions and a fair participation of everyone at the table. The input by the experts was mostly judged as objective, although some participants expressed concern that the views may have been slightly biased. We believe that everybody who was able to speak either French or Dutch had a chance to follow all stages of the G1000 without any problem and to get engaged either as participant or volunteer. Thanks to the G-Homes and the online discussion tool, the G-Offs, the deliberative process was not limited to the selected participants who were physically present in Brussels. For us, and probably also for the participants, the translation of the presentations by the experts was sometimes hard to follow, mostly due to interferences from the busy room. However, thanks to the mix of French slides and Dutch speech, and vice versa, the linguistic complexity throughout the day was managed successfully. Registration and arrival of the participants was well organised and all other aspects of the process went smoothly. Considering the number of participants and the size of the hall, the noise level was much lower than expected. However, we noticed some interference between the tables and some participants expressed their difficulties in hearing others across their table. This affected especially elderly participants who had more difficulties to follow the debates.

All in all, we can state that the G1000 has been a great success in the view of participants, although some minor problems and challenges occurred.

About the experts

Thanks to the simultaneous translation of the keynote speeches into English we were able to gain a good understanding of the thematic context of the debates. From what we have understood we find that the keynotes were slightly biased; the experts who introduced the three themes approached the matter from a somewhat 'left-wing' oriented perspective. Therefore their input did not necessarily represent the full diversity of the viewpoints on these themes. Since a plurality of expert views is a crucial element for the establishment of a legitimate and reliable deliberative process, we find that the somewhat one-sided input by the experts represented a weakness. Full access to the biographies of the speakers could have helped to put their keynote addresses into a context. However, we have to point out that the impact of the keynote speeches on the final voting results seemed to be small; the results are to be located in the middle of the political spectrum, or at least they do not show a clear correlation with the ones proposed by the experts. It thus seems that the danger was avoided: the experts did not have too much influence on the way proposals were framed and participants did not only respond to the proposals presented to them. Still, the keynote presentations could have been more divergent in order to enlarge the scope of discussions following at the tables. We believe a more divergent input, especially on the topic of the distribution of wealth, would have been beneficial and would have allowed for more non-conventional and new proposals.

About the G1000 as a form of politics

From what we understood the G1000 has always meant to be a complementary tool to the parliamentary or representative democracy and was aimed at providing new stimuli to the discussion about politics in Belgium. Listening to the final remarks of the presidents of the various parliaments in Belgium, we do see that G1000 has earned the respect of these politicians. This respect is summed up in what one of them stated: “we do not have the monopoly on ideas and solutions”. However, the G1000 has also triggered somewhat of an uneasy feeling among politicians with regard to the legitimacy of their own position and decisions. It will remain a challenge to persuade political representatives of the benefits of deliberative co-governance with citizens.

About the process

We were impressed by the fact the G1000 organisers had been able to mobilise so many volunteers, participants and media representatives. The energetic response to the public invitation that the organisers had issued is certainly to be credited to the organisers' efforts in the field of communication, dissemination of information and advocacy. At the same time, this public success was also evidence of the fact that the ideas behind the G1000 are right on the nail. Its success reflects the citizens' eagerness to be involved in new forms of political engagement that allow their voices to be heard. Impressive was also the smooth and to-the-minute flow of the entire G1000 process. With military-like precision notes were passed from the tables to the central desk enabling the aggregation of themes, the preparation of powerpoint slides, and the preparation of ballots. It was proof of the fact that many skilful people with different resources and capacities had been involved in the planning and implementation of this event and that reliable technology was in place, e.g. voting machines and visual presentation techniques. The downside of this tight schedule was the necessity to set up a strict system of top-down management, both at the tables and at the central desk. This might have influenced or at least limited the outcomes. As the central desk had the power to predetermine the policy options for a later vote by clustering the many different proposals from every table, its potential influence should not be underestimated. To our view, this process should have been made more explicit and transparent, especially for the participants. For them it was not always clear how the proposals were ranked and prepared at the end for voting. Additionally, the classification of the information coming from each table along a pre-set number of proposals stemming from the experts' keynote speeches somewhat reduced the amount of creativity present in the deliberations. However, we believe that the central desk's application of a “grounded theory” approach and a successful round of reliability tests gave the process a high level of validity and led to a reliable clustering. As stated earlier, the participants shared our appreciation of the validity of the process of clustering. Concerning the amount of themes, we believe that the decision to discuss four distinct themes in the course of one day limited the participants' capacity to fully assimilate the complexity of each of these themes. In addition there was no thematic material or information made available to the participants prior to the event. A smaller number of topics would have allowed for better and more fine-tuned proposals. An

additional plenary session in which participants could reflect and compare their discussions with those of other tables could have helped as well. We have to stress however that we did not find evidence of too much influence by the central desk or the organisers on the clustering of proposals. The bottom-up procedure to identify three distinct themes for the G1000, starting with several thousands of issues and including the vote of several thousands of citizens, was a great success. However, the process of framing, summarising and clustering the thousands of ideas to a list of 25 needs to be made more transparent and the methodology should be explained. Such an explanation could also include more information about the team in charge of the clustering and framing as their socio-economic and demographic background might have impacted the process. The very user friendly website, however, has already offered lots of information on the manifesto, principles, funding mechanisms, the work plan and other elements, and has thus ensured a high degree of transparency.

A major factor contributing to the success of the G1000 was the presence of the several hundreds of volunteers who took care of catering, refreshments, breaks or the kids' corner. Not only their commitment during the G1000 day was crucial, also their engagement throughout the recruiting process. The management of the volunteers was equally successful. The name *G1000* presented a risk. As G-summits usually end in failure and are often accompanied by big and sometimes violent mass protests, the name could have triggered some unfortunate connotations. But these connotations turned out to be irrelevant. The G1000 team also secured its independence of financial supporters by ceiling the financial support of an individual actor to 7% of the total project budget.

In summary, the G1000 has lived up to the internationally accepted standards of mass deliberative processes, with regard to the selection of participants as well as the clustering of the topics and proposals.

About the facilitators

From what we have seen, the facilitators did a terrific job in extremely difficult circumstances: very long hours; different skill sets and abilities of the participants; noisy, crowded surroundings; linguistic differences; a tightly-packed agenda. We were impressed to see them in action, and they were a clear asset to the organisation, even more so given the fact that they were doing this work voluntarily. They applied participatory methods that allowed for active participation and ownership of the tables and the aggregated results. Moreover, they alternated between different formats and techniques, which made the whole process lively and easy to follow even for those who are not used to speak in public. The facilitators presented and clearly explained the process for the table discussions and guided the participants through the process. Stationery and related materials at all tables, including mobile flip charts, were well planned, appropriate and widely used. It was clear from the hearty and prolonged applause that the facilitators received at the end of the day that their work had been strongly appreciated. We recommend to collect the facilitators' experiences. Their perceptions on group dynamics and contents of the debate are extremely valuable for both the evaluation process of the G1000 and the G32. Although the

preparation and briefing of the facilitators did happen only a day prior to the event, they mostly felt well prepared and secure, surely also thanks to their own professional background and experience. Along with the graphic facilitation, they were the key to success.

About the G32

We find it very important that the G32 will be given adequate space and time to truly get to grips with the complexities of the themes and that every effort is made to ensure that it is they who are in control of the agenda of the final discussions, not the G1000 organising team. We also suggest to brief key political leaders about the G32 in order to achieve sufficient political buy-in and ensure that the results of the G32 are transposed to decision-making debates. We believe it is very important that all the input submitted to the central desk during the G1000 is passed on to the G32 and taken into account. In this way it will be possible to assess the quality of the clustering process and to see how much the clustering process covered all the policy options identified during the G1000. We recommend to maintain a high level of transparency for the G32 process and to allow those who are not participating in this process a way to be kept informed of the process and its results. It was a wise decision to include participants of the G-homes and the G-offs in the G32; this will give the project additional strength.

Having received a great deal of attention from the national and international media, the organisers of the G1000 should now make an effort to invite politicians to formulate responses to this process. It will be important to see how they act upon the proposals, especially the ones the G32 will produce. Perhaps an additional media event should be organised at which political representatives discuss the final outcome. In this way the G1000 could push elected representatives towards explaining their policy choices and making them accountable for taking them into account. In this way the expectations of the participants of the G1000 could be satisfied and frustration might be avoided. We recommend using the experiences and insights of the G1000 to draw more general lessons on participatory processes, their output and impact. Given the heavy costs and logistics associated with participatory methodologies, how can a strong link with the political level be established in order to ensure that the results will be duly considered?

Concerning the content of the discussions, one could investigate which topics are the most suitable for mass deliberation and identify the added value of such processes especially regarding controversial issues. In addition, it would be good to learn lessons from the participants. What were their feelings, what has motivated them to take part, and how did they experience the G1000? It would be worthwhile to survey participants on such issues. Talking to participants, we noticed that there was a diffused understanding of why the G1000 actually was happening and we heard that people participated for a variety of reasons. A strong recurring theme in our conversations, however, was that there is a general dissatisfaction with the way democracy in Belgium is organised. The G1000 could help to define what kind of democracy would be better suited to meet the needs of today's citizens.

Biographies

Rapporteur for the international observer team

Martin Wilhelm (Citizens for Europe, Germany)

Martin Wilhelm is the director of Citizens for Europe e.V. is a Berlin-based, non-partisan, non-governmental and nonprofit organisation, established by young Europeans from throughout the Union in the beginning of 2010. The organisations' objective is to develop and promote a new form of European citizenship that is independent of national and cultural attributes and empowers citizens in the EU with more political participation opportunities, from local to European level. Martin Wilhelm sets up the organisation's strategic plans and coordinates international partnerships, fundraising activities and project development. Prior to CFE, Martin Wilhelm worked in different public and civil society organisations across Europe. He grew up in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany.

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Other members of the team

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The Danish Board of Technology is an independent council supervised by the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Development. The purpose of The Danish Board of Technology is to diffuse information on technology: IT, genetic engineering, energy, environmental issues, biotechnology, health and transportation. The Danish Board of Technology has developed numerous methods for the purpose of involving citizens, including the so-called Citizens' Hearing and the Consensus Conference. By means of these methods, among others, the Danish Board of Technology seeks the counsel of common citizens with regard to societal issues, thus gaining knowledge of the public's priorities, ideas and suggested solutions.

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Prof. dr. David Farrell (University College Dublin, Ireland)

Professor Farrell is a specialist in the study of parties, elections, electoral systems and members of parliament. He is founding co-editor of Party Politics and a co-editor of the Oxford University Press series on 'Comparative Politics'. Prior to his move to Dublin, Professor Farrell was professor and head of Social Sciences at the University of Manchester.

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Dr. Clodagh Harris (University College Cork, Ireland)

Dr Clodagh Harris is a lecturer in the Department of Government, University College Cork. Her research interests include; deliberative democracy, active democratic citizenship, political participation and the scholarship of teaching and learning in political science. She has published in leading international journals such as Representation, European Political Science, PS Political Science and Politics and the Journal of Political Science Education. In 2004 she was seconded to TASC an independent think tank in Dublin to manage its Democracy Commission project (funded by the JRCT) and edit its final report 'Engaging citizens the case for democratic renewal in Ireland' (2005). During her time with the Commission she organised its public consultations across the island of Ireland on issues of political participation particularly amongst the under 25s and those living in socially disadvantaged areas. Forum theatre and community art were used to engage with the target groups. Dr Harris is also one of the key authors of 'Power to the People: Assessing Democracy in Ireland', New Island: Dublin (2007), the first comprehensive audit of the state of democracy in modern Ireland. Dr. Harris has also been commissioned by the National Forum on Europe and by the European Movement to facilitate the Irish strands of the European Citizens Consultations.

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Richard J. Stillman II is a Professor of Public Administration at the School of Public Affairs, University of Colorado Denver. He taught on the faculties of George Mason University and California State University-Bakersfield and is the author or editor of several books. Stillman is an elected fellow in the National Academy of Public Administration and his textbook, Public Administration: Concepts and Cases, 8th edition is used at over 400 universities and colleges. Professor Stillman is the Editor of Public Administration Review, The Premier Journal of Public Administration.

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Julien Talpin is a research fellow in political science at Ceraps/University of Lille 2. His research deals with deliberative democracy, political socialisation and the transformations of representative government. He has studied a variety of democratic innovations from citizen juries, neighbourhood councils and participatory budgeting. Using both ethnographic and socio-historical methods, he has mainly focused on the individual impact of participation and deliberation. He has recently published 'When democratic innovations let the people decide: An evaluation of co-governance experiments' (edited by B. Geissel, K. Newton); Democratic Innovations, (Routledge, 2011); and (with S. Wojcik), 'Deliberating environmental policy issues: Comparing the learning potential of online and face-to-face discussions on climate change', Policy and Internet, 2010, 2 (4).

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Jean Tillie studied Political Science and wrote his PhD dissertation on determinants and measurement of party preference and voting behaviour, at the Universiteit van Amsterdam. Jean Tillie is Professor Electoral Policies by special appointment at the University of Amsterdam. He is also the programme leader of the AISSR programme group 'Challenges to Democratic Representation'. Jean Tillie studies the quality of multicultural democracy. His research focuses on radicalism and extremism, extreme right voting behaviour, anti-immigrant feelings and the political integration of immigrants. He is also coordinating the EURISLAM project (an international comparative study on the social-cultural integration of Muslims).

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This delegation represents the 'Citizens' Policy' Unit at the European Commission's Communication DG. The unit's Europe for Citizens programme's main priorities include encouraging citizens to become actively involved in the process of European integration, empowering them to develop a sense of European identity, and enhancing mutual understanding between Europeans. In more concrete terms, the programme's priority areas are: promoting participation and democracy at the EU level; the future of the Union and its basic values; intercultural dialogue; employment, social cohesion and sustainable development; and boosting awareness of the societal impact of EU policies.

http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/who-we-are/doc58_en.htm