Report: Future Roadmap for European Media and Democracy

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Executive summary

Deliverable 6.4 of the Horizon Europe Project “Mapping Media for Future Democracies” (MeDeMAP) presents a “Future roadmap for European media and democracy” as the joint outcome of the national Citizens’ Parliaments on Media and Democracy that have been implemented in the WP6 partner countries Austria, Czech Republic, Ireland and Slovenia (and in an online format as a methodological experiment in Germany) between March and June 2025.

The implementation of the Citizens’ Parliaments (CP) was guided by the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), with an aim of including and empowering citizens in the research process. Based on the deliberations and resolutions produced by the citizens and the data collected throughout the process of the Citizens' Parliaments, national and comparative analyses were conducted by the WP6 research teams and aggregated in this report. The aims of the research are, firstly, to map how European citizens envision the way media in Europe can better fulfil their democratic roles, and secondly, to reflect the participatory process of the Citizens’ Parliament against the background of democratic theory.

The deliverable consists of three main parts plus a set of Appendices:

Part I outlines the methodological framework used for the national and comparative analyses (chapter 1). Complementing this part, an excursus on the methodological experiment of the online Citizens’ Parliament in Germany is included (chapter 2).

Part II consists of the four national research reports of the WP6 partner countries Czech Republic (chapter 3), Austria (chapter 4), Ireland (chapter 5) and Slovenia (chapter 6). The four national research teams report on their implementation and analysis of their national Citizens’ Parliaments on Media and Democracy and present their detailed findings for the two research questions that were the focus of the analyses. The Czech national research report is put in the front, as it includes as an additional section a brief overview of the theoretical framework by Carpentier & Wimmer (2025) on the intersection of democracy and media underpinning the analysis of all national CPs (see section 3.3).

Part III presents comparative analyses that were conducted on the basis of the four national research reports. The comparative analyses aggregate the national results and highlight commonalities and differences in the envisionments of the democratic roles of media (RQ1, chapter 7) and in the performance of the participatory process and the constructions of media and democracy (RQ2, chapter 8) in the Citizens’ Parliaments. The report concludes with a summary of the main findings of the “Future roadmap for European media and democracy” and gives recommendations aimed at relevant stakeholders in policy making, media, education and wider civil society (chapter 9).

The Appendices include a compilation of all 133 resolutions adopted by the four Citizens’ Parliaments on Media and Democracy (Appendix A) and some of the methodological instruments used in the research by the national teams (Appendix B).

Introduction

This report, constituting Deliverable 6.4 within the Horizon Europe project "MeDeMAP – Mapping Media for Future Democracies", presents the national and aggregate analyses of the "Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy" that were implemented in the MeDeMAP partner countries Austria, Czech Republic, Ireland and Slovenia between March and June 2025. The outcome of these analyses is a "Future roadmap for European media and democracy", responding to the central aim of the project to set out future-proof pathways to strengthen democracy through the strengthening of democratic media. This future roadmap intends to complement the "current" map of European political information environments based on the results of the research led by the other Work Packages of the MeDeMAP project.

Work Package 6, "Supply Meets demand" within the MeDeMAP project focuses on the thematic junction between the research conducted by the other Work Packages on media systems and regulation (WP3), media supply (WP4) and media demand (WP5), and is guided by the theoretical framework laid out in WP2, as published in the book "Democracy and Media in Europe. A Discursive-Material Approach" (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025). In contrast to the other work packages, which drew on traditional methods of empirical social science, WP6 adopted a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to involve citizens in the research process through the implementation of Citizens' Parliaments (CP)[1] in Austria, the Czech Republic, Ireland and Slovenia – and in an online format as a methodological experiment in Germany.

In the Citizen's Parliaments on Media and Democracy, 20 participants in each country gathered on four full days to reflect and deliberate about their expectations on how media can support democracy in the best possible way and to formulate recommendations or resolutions on the three broad topics of "media systems and media regulation", "representation in the media" and "participation in and through the media".

The design of the Citizens' Parliaments was set out in detail in Deliverable 6.2 (Monnot et al., 2025b), which was based on a study of successful practices of policy development with citizens' parliaments in Europe (Deliverable 6.1, Monnot et al., 2025a). The Citizens' Parliaments followed the PAR cycle – a circular and iterative process of learning, reflection, deliberation and the development of resolutions over the course of four sessions (Monnot et al., 2025b, p. 21). The implementation of the Citizens' Parliaments has been accompanied by a dedicated blog (Deliverable 6.3, Monnot et al., 2025c),[2] and their process and outcomes have been communicated and disseminated to a range of stakeholders on national and European levels by the WP6 partners, as detailed in a separate report (Deliverable 6.5, Monnot et al., 2026).

On the basis of the resolutions adopted by the citizens and a variety of other data collected during the process of the four Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy, the four national research teams in Austria (COMMIT), Czech Republic (Charles University), Ireland (Mary Immaculate College) and Slovenia (Peace Institute) conducted national analyses of their CPs,

[1] Note: The terms „Citizens' Parliament" and "citizen parliament" are used interchangeably by the WP6 partners in this report to refer to their national CPs.
[2] The MeDeMAP Blog on the Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy in Austria, Czech Republic, Ireland and Slovenia can be found here: https://medemap.commit.at/medemap-blog/.

which were synchronized by the WP6 research coordinator from the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OEAW) and aggregated by COMMIT as WP6 leader in the present report, “Future roadmap for European media and democracy”.

The aim of these analyses is to map how European citizens envision the future for democratic media in Europe, and to evaluate the process of the Citizens’ Parliaments on Media and Democracy against the background of democratic theory. These analyses correspond to MeDeMAP Task 6.3, “Analysis of the sessions and final decisions of Citizens’ Parliaments”, which focuses on the output of the resolutions and of the process to generate their content, and Task 6.4, “Evaluation of PAR research”, which focuses on the analysis of the participatory process and the construction of media and democracy in the CPs.

The goals of these two tasks are the basis of the two main research questions guiding the research and analysis of the Citizens’ Parliaments:

- **RQ1:** How do the Citizens’ Parliament participants in the four countries envision the democratic roles of media in their recommendations / resolutions for future perspectives and in the processes leading to these recommendations?
- **RQ2:** How are democracy and media constructed in the participatory process of the four Citizens’ Parliaments?

The report aggregates both general and country-specific results from the analyses of the four WP6 research teams. These results and their theory-driven evaluation are not only intended to be read by an academic audience, but they are also aimed at relevant stakeholders in the areas of policymaking, regulation, self-governance, journalistic work, media literacy and the facilitation of participatory processes. As laid out in the Grant Agreement (p. 15 of Part B), the research of the Citizens’ Parliaments reveals “citizens’ democratically relevant expectations towards the media that are currently not fulfilled or only partially fulfilled, their willingness to get involved in democratic processes, but also the existing potential that may endanger the democratic order”, and provides “future-proof guidelines and recommendations how supply can best meet demand in a democracy-supporting sense”.

Image 1: Discussion with experts in the Czech citizen parliament (Prague, 15 March 2025). Photo credit: The Czech citizen parliament organisational team

PART I:
THE METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

1 Methodological Framework

Authors: Andrea Sedlaczek and Helmut Peissl (COMMIT)

1.1 Using a qualitative methodology

The research in this report uses a qualitative methodology, in line with the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach that informed the design and implementation of the Citizens' Parliaments, and on the basis of a variety of qualitative data collected and analysed by the national research teams during and after the process of the CPs.

The Citizens' Parliaments within the MeDeMAP Project were implemented with a PAR-approach (Lawson et al., 2015). The aim was to involve citizens in the research in as many steps of the process as possible, from the design over the decision-making to the evaluation (Monnot et al., 2025a, p. 21). PAR is based on a principle of problem-centred work, in which participants not only identify the problems that they are concerned with, but are also empowered to find solutions to them in a cooperative manner (Lawson, 2015, pp. 10-11). The design of the Citizens' Parliaments incorporates the PAR cycle, consisting of the iterative and co-creative phases of learning, reflection and development of solutions (Monnot et al., 2025b, p. 21).

The core output of the Citizens' Parliaments are a number of resolutions developed by the citizens under the three topics defined by the WP6 research teams in advance: "Media systems and media regulation", "Representation in the media" and "Participation in and through the media". Complementing this formal output, the national research teams implementing the CPs collected a variety of data capturing the processes of the Citizens' Parliaments, using methods from qualitative and ethnographic research (e.g. ethnographic fieldnotes, interviews, surveys, audio recordings) (see section 1.2). The collected data were analysed by the national research teams with a qualitative approach of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), based on a reflexive process of coding and the development of themes (see section 1.5 below).

Image 2: Parliamentarians working on the formulation of resolutions in the Czech citizen parliament (Olomouc, 5 April 2025). Photo credit: The Czech citizen parliament organisational team

To coordinate the research of the four national teams and ensure the comparability of their approaches, while still allowing for variations based on the national contexts and the needs of the involved citizens, detailed methodological guidelines and trainings were established for data collection and data analysis. The main guidelines for the implementation of the Citizen's Parliaments were set out in Deliverable 6.2 (Monnot et al., 2025b), and COMMIT provided a training on The Art of Hosting (AoH) as the facilitation method for the Citizen's Parliaments in Vienna in December 2024 (Woolf & Corrigan, 2020; Quick & Sandfort, 2014).

Instructions on data collection were included in D6.2. and common guidelines for the surveys and interviews used were created by the research partners (see section 1.2 and Appendix B). Vaia Doudaki from Charles University organized an online training session for the two ethnographic observers enlisted by each of the national teams for accompanying each CP session in February 2025. The training consisted of an introduction to ethnographic research and methods (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010) and provided guidelines for observing and taking notes, focusing on the key sensitising concepts underpinning the two research questions that the observers were tasked to take notes on.

Andreas Martin from the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OEAW) acted as the research coordinator of WP6. He conducted several online training and coordination sessions for data analysis and analytical synchronization and provided templates for coding trees and the national research reports (see section 1.5 below). This analytical coordination and synchronization process was important to ensure a consistent quality of research and a comparability of the results, while still allowing for the autonomy of the research teams and an openness to the national specificities captured in the data. As part of the national research reports (Part II in this deliverable), the national teams have been tasked to outline their methods and process of data collection and analysis used, allowing to evaluate the quality of research in terms of validity and reliability (Cresswell, 2014; Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Image 3: Ethnographers at work in the Czech citizen parliament (Prague, 17 May 2025)
Photo credit: The Czech citizen parliament organisational team

1.2 The data gathering process

As specified in the common CP design, the analyses are based on a variety of data collected during, between and after the four sessions of the Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy (see Monnot et al., 2025b, pp. 27–29 and Annex 11). These include:

- The drafted and final resolutions as they were adopted by the citizens on each of the 3 topics, together with the subtopics defined by the citizens and the results of their votes
- Flipcharts, posters and other material produced during the CP meetings by the participants and/or facilitators
- Audio recordings of plenary discussions during the CP sessions (group discussions were not recorded)
- Ethnographic fieldnote reports produced by the two ethnographic observers from each CP session (focussing on RQ1 and RQ2 respectively)
- Minutes of the CP sessions produced by the moderators/facilitators after each session and shared with the participants
- Online feedback surveys filled out by the participants after each CP session (see the common survey questionnaire in Appendix B.1)
- Dissenting and confirmatory opinions on the accepted resolutions by the participants gathered through a dedicated online survey after CP sessions 2, 3 and 4
- 5 interviews with a selection of participants after the end of the last CP session (see the common interview guide for the post-CP interviews in Appendix B.2)

Detailed information on the data collected and analysed by the national research teams are given in the analytical reports included as part of the national research reports (see Part II).

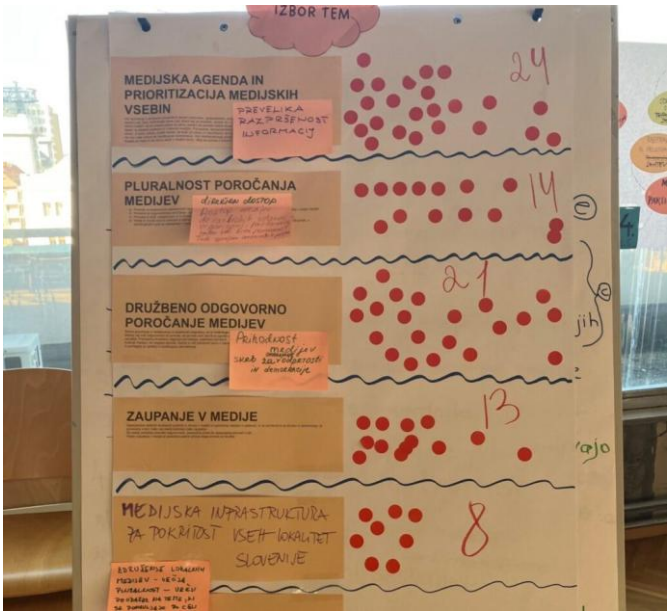

Image 4: Flipchart with the selection of subtopics on Media and Representation in the Slovenian Citizens' Parliament (Ljubljana, 12 April 2025). Photo credit: Peace Institute

1.3 The corpus for the analysis

The national research teams were responsible for collecting, managing and analysing their data corpus, consisting of the collected material of their Citizens' Parliament mentioned above. The teams were free to decide how to manage and select their data in the coding process, i.e. whether to produce transcripts of audio data or not; whether to code manually or with the use of a data analysis software (e.g. MAXQDA) etc. Data collection of all teams was compliant with data protection principles as set out in the project's Data Management Plan.[3] All participating citizens have been anonymized in the analysed data.

While the national analyses presented in Part II in this report are based on the collected data from the respective CP, the comparative analyses in Part III are only based on information provided in the four national research reports and the coding trees of the national teams, not the original data from the CPs.

Image 5: Audio recording devices used in the Slovenian Citizens' Parliament (Ljubljana, 29 March 2025). Photo credit: Peace Institute

1.4 The research questions

The research conducted on the basis of the Citizens' Parliaments was informed by two main Research Questions (RQ) and a number of corresponding Secondary Research Questions (SRQ), which were developed to capture the two tasks defined within the MeDeMAP Project for the analysis of the CPs: Task 6.3, "Analysis of the sessions and final decisions of Citizens' Parliaments", and Task 6.4, "Evaluation of PAR research". The research questions are instructed by the theoretical framework presented in Carpentier and Wimmer (2025), incorporating key

[3] Photos used in this report to illustrate the CP processes have also been selected in compliance with these principles (participants are not shown close up or from the front and faces have been blurred). Photos are only used in Part I and Part III, not in the national reports in Part II.

concepts concerning media's democratic roles, participatory intensities (maximalist/minimalist participation) as well as core components, struggles and threats for democracy and media.[4]

Research question 1: How do the citizen parliament participants in the four countries envision the democratic roles of media in their recommendations / resolutions for future perspectives and in the processes leading to these recommendations?

Secondary Research Questions 1:

a) What articulations of the media's democratic roles did the participants in the CPs prioritise, which were omitted and which received only limited attention?
b) Which recommendations on future perspectives received consensus within the CPs? Which future perspectives were the object of political struggle, and which ideological perspectives structured these differences?
c) How balanced were the power relations that characterized the process of producing the recommendations of the CPs? How was conflict handled during the process? How was collaboration achieved during the process?
d) How are the CPs' imaginaries of the media's democratic roles similar and different in the four countries against the background of their respective political agendas?

Research Question 2: How are democracy and media constructed in the participatory process of the four citizen parliaments?

Secondary Research Questions 2:

a) How is participation performed in the CPs? Which (sub)processes are forms of minimalist / maximalist participation?
b) How is democracy constructed in the CPs? Which core components are accepted (or not), and how do the citizens in the CPs position themselves towards the relevant political struggles and threats?
c) How are media constructed in the CPs? Which core components are accepted (or not), and how do the citizens in the CPs position themselves towards the relevant political struggles and threats?
d) What are the similarities and differences between the four countries in terms of their performance of participation and their constructions of democracy and media?

The two main research questions RQ1 and RQ2 and their corresponding first three secondary research questions (RQ1, SRQa+b+c and RQ2, SRQa+b+c) were the basis for the four national analyses (Part II in this report), while the fourth secondary research questions (RQ1, SRQd and RQ2, SRQd) are the main focus of the comparative analyses (Part III in this report).

[4] An overview of these sensitising theoretical concepts from Carpentier and Wimmer's (2025) framework is included in the Czech national research report at the beginning of Part II (see section 3.3).

1.5 Methods for national analyses

Contributing author: Andreas Martin (Austrian Academy of Sciences, OEAW)

1.5.1 Training the national teams

The training of the national research teams was guided by the approach to qualitative analysis found in "reflexive thematic analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It is part of "thematic analysis" (TA), a "family of methods" (ibid. 227). It was chosen because it offers "an accessible and robust method for those new to qualitative analysis" (ibid.). It was therefore ideal for coordinating the work of four research teams from mixed backgrounds in academic and civil society contexts.

At a very basic level, thematic analysis is a method for developing, analyzing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processing of data coding to develop themes – themes are the ultimate analytic purpose. Its core assumptions are that researcher subjectivity is the primary tool for reflexive TA, as knowledge generation is seen as inherently subjective and stated. Researcher subjectivity is understood and treated as a resource for doing analysis. Analysis and interpretation of data is not seen in terms of accuracy or objectivity, but in terms of weaker (e.g. unconvincing, underdeveloped, shallow, superficial) or stronger (e.g. compelling, insightful, thoughtful, rich, complex, deep, nuanced) interpretation. Good coding can be achieved alone, or through collaboration – good quality codes and themes are seen as resulting from dual processes of: a) immersion and depth of engagement, and b) giving the developing analysis some distance (through taking the time and breaks from the process). Themes are understood as patterns anchored by a shared idea, meaning or concept. They are analytic outputs – built from codes (which are also analytic outputs) and cannot be identified ahead of the analytic process. In thematic analysis, themes do not passively 'emerge' from data but are actively produced by the researcher through their systematic engagement with, and all they bring to, the dataset. Data analysis is always underpinned by theoretical assumptions, and these assumptions need to be acknowledged and reflected on. Reflexivity is key to good quality analysis; researchers must strive to understand and "own their perspectives" (Braun & Clarke 2022, p. 8).

The structuring of the analytical process of the citizen parliaments was oriented around the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis: (1) data set familiarization; (2) data coding; (3) initial theme generation; (4) theme development and review; (5) theme refining, defining and naming; and (6) writing up (Braun & Clarke 2022, p. 4ff.). This process is not strictly linear – thematic analysis is conceptualized by Braun and Clarke as a progressive but recursive process, moving along a trajectory from dataset to developed analysis, that "often involves going sideways, backwards, and sometimes even around in circles, as you move from the start to the end of the process" (ibid., p. 36).

Three training sessions

The research coordinator (OEAW) conducted three online training sessions with the four national CP teams. The objective of these trainings was to ensure analytical synchronization by creating an interpretive community. All meetings were recorded, and the recordings made available to the participants afterwards, alongside utilized materials (PowerPoint slides/online pinboards).

The first training was conducted in March 2025 and aimed at creating a common knowledge base around reflexive thematic analysis. The research coordinator provided an introduction to the method as a process for identifying patterns within qualitative data. He discussed the dual analytical moves of "zooming in" on the data to attribute codes, and the "zooming out" process using these codes to generate themes. He showed the teams how to organize these codes and themes hierarchically in a "coding tree". The research coordinator then gave an overview of the two further envisioned trainings, one training focussing on the coding done in the individual teams, the second on how the teams would synchronize their results and work together. It was agreed by the teams that the two trainings concerning the actual coding ought to only take place following the conclusion of the national citizen parliament sessions in June 2025. This was deemed sensible because it would enable the teams to switch from managing a citizen parliament process to viewing all data gathered during the citizen parliaments as one undifferentiated "pile" and thereby begin the process of "dataset familiarization".

The second and third trainings took place in June 2025. The second training addressed the qualitative coding process done within the national teams. The third training addressed how the teams would synchronize their results and work together, allowing for reflexivity.

The objective of the second training was to familiarize the teams with the process of coding the qualitative data generated by the citizen parliament sessions. The research coordinator first reviewed the research questions with the teams and discussed how they are inspired by the theoretical framework on the construction of media and democracy developed as part of WP2 (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025) – the coding done would be 'inspired by the categories' derived from this theoretical framework. The teams then coded three fictitious instances of deliberation by citizen parliament participants in succession and presented their coding in the form of coding trees via a shared online pinboard. The coding trees and the coding process were discussed between coding sessions. This process succeeded in providing the teams with confidence that they could identify relevant material in the examples, and that they were identifying similar material in comparable ways. It revealed the extent to which the teams were already synchronized, in that they were familiar with the shared theoretical framework they were drawing on for their coding.

The objective of the third training was to create consensus around the coding process and analytical synchronization. The research coordinator presented the teams with a timeline where they would code individually in July and August 2025, and then jointly compare and contrast their coding trees at the beginning of September 2025. He offered to facilitate this joint analysis meeting by providing the teams with a first integration of their coding trees, based on commonalities. A panel discussion at the biannual MeDeMAP consortium meeting in St. Pölten (Austria) at the end of September 2025 would be used to present a first aggregation of the results in the form of draft national research reports. A follow-up meeting after these presentations would allow the teams to discuss and further calibrate their results. The teams agreed to this structure but requested a common coding template to ensure efficient synchronization of the coding process.

Coding tree template

The research coordination developed two coding tree templates at the end of June which were adequate to coding the logic of the research questions and their theoretical concepts

(constructions of democracy, constructions of media, and media's democratic roles). These templates ensured both that the teams had the same "umbrella" underneath which they could arrange their work, and that the analysis was already synchronized with the theory (of the construction of democracy, media and media's democratic roles).

In terms of the design decisions informing the coding tree template, these flowed from addressing an inconsistency in the research questions: While secondary research questions are commonly steps towards addressing the main research question, designing the coding tree template revealed that this was not the case for the secondary research questions for RQ1. These secondary research questions in fact contain two further main research questions (one research question concerning power (RQ1, SRQb+c), another research question concerning ideology (RQ1, SRQb). This inconsistency was addressed by limiting the coding tree template for RQ1 to "media's democratic roles" (thereby gathering data for RQ1 and RQ1, SRQa), and ensuring the necessary data collection for answering the secondary research questions via a framework informed by the theorization of the construction of democracy in Carpentier and Wimmer (2025) (differentiating between "representation" and "participation", as well as between "enactment" (doings) and "discursive practices" (sayings)) in the template for RQ2. In this way, the necessary data was collected to inform the secondary research questions about the participatory process for RQ1 (RQ1, SRQb+c). Data to answer the secondary research question concerning which ideological perspectives structured the differences between future perspectives (RQ1, SRQb) would be gathered through the "discursive practices of representation/participation", as well as through the "construction of media" parts of the template.

To ensure a comparable level of quality between the coding trees, it was also decided that the research coordinator would use the templates to code the German online citizen parliament ("methodological experiment", see chapter 2) he had facilitated in May/June 2025. Making these coding trees available to the teams would provide them with a first orientation as to the necessary complexity of the analysis. He would then ask the teams for their preliminary coding trees individually and give feedback, allowing him to intervene in the coding process if necessary.

1.5.2 National coding processes

The four national research teams coded their data corpus of the collected material from their Citizen's Parliament in the summer of 2025 and produced their coding trees for RQ1 and RQ2 according to the template provided by the research coordinator. In the national research reports in Part II, a section in the analytical report is dedicated for the research teams to specify their coding process, the sensitising concepts they used and how their analysis was impacted by the synchronization with the other national research teams. These accounts testify that while the strategies used for coding varied slightly between the teams, e.g. in the use of data analysis software or manual coding, and in the degree to which the coding followed more inductive or deductive principles, there is enough consistency to allow for reliable and comparable results. All teams were attentive to ensuring an open approach to their data, while still maintaining a theory-informed methodology that is based on the key sensitising concepts provided by Carpentier and Wimmer's (2025) theoretical framework on democracy and media (an overview of these concepts is given in the Czech national report in section 3.3).

1.5.3 The analytical synchronization process

The analytical synchronization process took place in September 2025 and flowed from the teams comparing their coding trees, allowing for reflection and calibration.

The teams made their coding trees available to the research coordinator at the beginning of September, and the research coordinator identified initial commonalities between them. In the following joint analysis meeting, the teams calibrated their coding trees. They did this by first reflecting on difficulties in the coding process and then discussing the first coding tree integration presented by the research coordinator. They agreed that their coding trees were of comparable quality, but that different levels of abstraction were used to address an aspect of the coding trees, namely the construction of democracy. Considering the detailedness of their coding trees, the teams agreed that they would be responsible for using the coding trees of the other teams – available on a shared online pinboard – to further calibrate their own coding trees, adjusting them in case they noticed elements among the others which they had overlooked.

The teams used the analysis in their coding trees to present draft national research reports to colleagues at the biannual MeDeMAP consortium meeting in St. Pölten at the end of September 2025. These presentations demonstrated the extent to which the analyses of the teams were synchronized. At a follow-up meeting after the presentations, further calibration of not yet synchronized analytical facets was possible.

1.5.4 The aggregation of the research results

The teams aggregated the analytical output present in their coding trees into the second analytic output of themes, or patterns anchored by a shared idea, meaning or concept (Braun & Clarke, 2025). These themes were answers to the main and secondary research questions. They were generated by reflecting the codes and the (theoretically informed) relations between the codes in the coding trees and drawing on the theorization of media and democracy in Carpentier and Wimmer (2025).

Presenting preliminary research results at the MeDeMAP consortium meeting in St. Pölten at the end of September 2025 initiated this process, with the follow up meeting allowing for discussion and clarification of this second analytical step.

The national teams used a common structure to write up their research results in the national reports (see Part II), provided by the research coordinator:

1. Organisational report

- Timeframe:
  - When did the citizen parliament sessions take place? How many sessions were there? How long were the individual sessions?
- Participants:
  - How many participants took part in each of the CPs?
  - How diverse were the participants along sociodemographic lines (age/gender/migratory background/region/educational level)?
  - Please describe how you recruited the participants: How did you reach them? What criteria did you use to recruit them?

- Location:
  - Were the CP sessions in one location or in multiple locations? Please name the locations.
  - Why did you select this/these location(s)?
- Moderators / Facilitators:
  - How many moderators/facilitators did you have?
  - What criteria did you use to recruit them?
- Experts / Training:
  - How many experts did you have?
  - How did you train them for their role in the CP process? Did you alter their role in the course of the CPs?
- Script:
  - What script did you use?
  - Why did you write this script the way you did? What were the main choices?

2. Analytical report

- Data collection:
  - What data did you gather? How did you gather this data?
- Sensitising concepts employed in the coding process:
  - Which sensitising concepts did you use to code your data pile?
- The analytical process in and across research teams:
  - Describe how working across CP teams helped you refine your analysis. How did it impact your coding and theme generation?

3. Findings and analysis: Research question 1

- Please include the exact formulation of Research Question 1 and its three secondary research questions
- First, provide an overview of the (main) themes that answer Research Question 1 and its three secondary research questions
- Please then answer the research questions in order, moving from the main research question to the three secondary research questions. Write up each theme individually, providing a detailed description and giving illustrative quotes from the data. Make sure that each theme is one answer to the research questions (and that they are at the same level of abstraction). Also make sure to use a consistent referencing system to refer to your data.

4. Findings and analysis: Research question 2

- Please include the exact formulation of Research Question 2 and its three secondary research questions
- First, provide an overview of the (main) themes that answer Research Question 2 and its three secondary research questions
- Please then answer the research questions in order, moving from the main research question to the three secondary research questions. Write up each theme individually, providing a detailed description and giving illustrative quotes from the data. Make sure that each theme is one answer to the research questions (and that they are at the same level of abstraction). Also make sure to use a consistent referencing system to refer to your data.

5. Short concluding reflection

- What significance do you think this participatory process of the CP had for the participants, against the background of your national democratic culture?

1.6 Methods for the comparative analyses

Based on the four national reports, comparative analyses were conducted by COMMIT to answer Secondary Research Questions RQ1, SRQd and RQ2, SRQd in this report (Part III). The comparative analyses thus do not capture all aspects laid out in the national reports but focus on the similarities and differences in the imaginaries of media's democratic roles (RQ1) and in the performance of participation and constructions of democracy and media (RQ2) in the four Citizens' Parliaments. To do so, the comparative analyses identify common themes emerging from the national reports in relation to the two secondary research questions and summarise their main commonalities and differences across the four CPs.

The comparative analyses were methodologically conducted in three steps: First, the themes answering RQ1 and RQ2, as they were laid out in the four national reports, were extracted and compiled in a tabular form. Second, themes were identified that were common across all four CPs, that were shared by two or three CPs or that were only reported in one CP. Based on these shared and distinct themes, in a third step, the descriptions of the themes from the four national reports were aggregated and synthesized through essential summarising, highlighting patterns of similarities as well as differences in the citizens' articulations and enactments across the four countries.

In the process of theme identification, comparison, and summarising, the comparative analyses were also mindful of bridging structural variations in the four national research reports caused by overlapping issues in the research questions and their respective secondary research questions, especially concerning RQ2 (see also section 1.5.1 and 1.7). The comparative analyses thus incorporate aspects of an aggregated analysis aimed at synthesizing the findings from the four national reports into a cohesive whole (Estabrooks et al. 1994). As the comparison and aggregation was conducted centrally by COMMIT, the comparative analyses necessarily remain interpretative, similar to the national analyses. An analytically deeper comparative analysis of the four CPs will be published in an academic article by Andreas Martin (OEAW) as the lead author at a later date.

1.7 Limits of the analyses

The research in this report is based on the analyses of the four Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy, which were conducted separately by the four national research teams in Austria (COMMIT), Czech Republic (Charles University), Ireland (Mary Immaculate College) and Slovenia (Peace Institute), and aggregated by COMMIT as WP6 leader. All teams followed common methodological guidelines for the implementation of their CPs and the analysis of their gathered data, and the research coordinator (OEAW) ensured their analytical synchronization as described above (see section 1.5). Still, variability in processes and results are to be expected when working in a transnational context of four research teams from mixed backgrounds in academic and civil society contexts.

This variability should, however, not be seen as a limitation, but as an inherent feature and strength of the participatory and qualitative design of the research, which also has an explorational aspiration. As the Citizens' Parliaments were implemented with an approach of Participatory Action Research, the national teams were encouraged to adapt their processes to the specific needs of their participating citizens. Likewise, a qualitative method of data analysis

was chosen that is explicitly aware of its reliance on researcher subjectivity and interpretation and does not see it as a flaw (see section 1.5.1 above). Thus, the quality of the analysis and the results cannot be evaluated in terms of strict criteria of accuracy and objectivity, but their validity and reliability are ensured by all research teams being transparent about their processes and methods of data collection and analysis in their national reports.

A certain degree of variability in the interpretation has also been caused by slight overlaps in the research questions and their respective secondary research questions, which had been developed based on the two corresponding tasks as described in the Grant Agreement (see section 1.4 above). These inconsistencies have been addressed in the coding tree templates provided by the research coordinator (see section 1.5.1 above), and they have led to certain aspects being discussed in different sections by the national teams in their reports (see Part II). Rather than seeing these differences in interpretation and classification of themes as limitations, they can be considered as valuable complementary contributions. The aggregated comparative analyses in Part III attempt to highlight and harmonize these slight differences to generate reliable comparative results.

Lastly, the output of the four national Citizens' Parliaments in terms of their adopted resolutions, which form the basis for the "Future roadmap for European media and democracy" in this deliverable, are not to be taken as strictly representative for the populations of the countries in question. The 20 citizens of each CP were chosen with an aim to reach "socio-demographic diversity and diversity of perspectives" (Monnot et al. 2025b, p. 10), without fulfilling strict criteria of representativity. Instead of representativity and strong generalizability, the implementation and research of the Citizens' Parliaments as a form of Participatory Action Research aimed at transferability of their processes and results (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller 2014). The envisionments for the future of democratic media in Europe are thus to be understood as the results of a participatory process that strove for "representing the interests of readers, listeners, viewers and online media users across various sociodemographic groups" (Monnot et al. 2025b, p. 10), and that can be transferred to a variety of societal and academic contexts.

Image 6: The facilitator explains proceedings to the diverse panel of citizens in the first session of the Austrian Citizens' Parliament (Vienna, 22 March 2025). Photo credit: COMMIT

2 Excursus: The methods of the methodological experiment

Author: Andreas Martin (Austrian Academy of Sciences, OEAW)

Apart from the four Citizens' Parliaments implemented by the WP6 partners in Austria, Czech Republic, Ireland and Slovenia, whose implementation and analysis is detailed in the national research reports in Part II of this deliverable, the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OEAW) conducted an online Citizens' Parliament in Germany as a methodological experiment. This online CP followed the same structure as the face-to-face CPs and had the main aim of testing the feasibility of conducting a Citizens' Parliament in an online format. While its results are not part of the "Future roadmap for European media and democracy", this chapter gives an insight into its implementation to demonstrate its viability. An academic paper on the specificities of the online setting for Citizen's Parliaments will be published at a later date by Andreas Martin.

The design of the methodological experiment of the German online citizen parliament contained the mandatory components agreed on by the partners (Monnot et al., 2025b, p. 15). It was modelled on the script of the Czech CP. Its adaptation for the online setting was derived from discussions with Nico Carpentier on the experience of the Czech team's implementation of their script, as well as refinement in the course of the online CP process.

As part of the participant recruitment process, a dedicated website was created on the OEAW domain with information about the CP and its contextualization in the MeDeMAP project, as well as links to thematic materials and the concurrently occurring Austrian CP (COMMIT) for reference. 19 German citizens participated in the online CP, hailing from the Würzburg region of northern Bavaria. The urban/rural mix of this region was ideal to meet the aim of recruiting citizens with diverse socio-political profiles. An agency familiar with this region was tasked with recruiting the participants. In all, seven women and twelve men participated in the online CP. In terms of age groups, these were diverse (six citizens aged 18-24 years; two citizens aged 24-34 years; one citizen aged 35-44; three citizens aged 45-54; two citizens aged 64 and over). The citizens were unfamiliar with each other.

The online CP sessions lasted for a total of 20h. These were spread out across five sessions (four sessions in May 2025, one session at the end of June 2025 due to German public holidays occurring in the first half of June). It was decided to have five sessions with 4h each because 4h were deemed the maximum amount of productive time possible in an online setting.

Each session took place on a Saturday afternoon (14:00–18:00) via an online meeting hosted on Zoom. The first two sessions addressed the introductory and agenda-setting components of the CP, while the ensuing sessions addressed a set of subtopics concerning aspects and dimensions of each of the three thematic areas (media systems, media representation, media participation). The parliamentarians developed a set of resolutions within each topic, formulating specific policy actions, measures and/or solutions, catering to identified issues. Taking the first two sessions to address the introductory and agenda-setting components of the CP ensured that the participants could be gradually familiarized with the online environment.

The online CP included learning components, providing resources to the participants concerning the three thematic areas of the citizen parliament (media systems, media representation and media participation), serving as sources of reference and of inspiration, when deliberating and formulating the resolutions. Experts invited to provide the participants with theoretical input were Dr. Josef Seethaler (OEAW) and Prof. Dr. Barbara Thomaß (Ruhr University Bochum) for the first agenda setting session on media and democracy. Prof. Dr. Thomaß returned for a Q&A at the beginning of the session on media systems, while Fabian Ekstedt (Radio LORA Munich) was invited to provide the parliamentarians with the perspective of a practitioner at a community radio station for the sessions on both representation and participation. The experts were briefed prior to the sessions about the overall theme and rationale of the citizen parliament and the specific thematic area of the session they would join. They were also given access to the video addressing the thematic area they would talk about, to be used by them as a source of inspiration.

Andreas Martin was the main moderator, facilitating the CP's plenary sessions and guiding the participants throughout the sessions' activities. He was assisted by three further facilitators – Ernest Thaqi, Fiona Hendrych and Thomas Ernst. Plenary sessions occurred in the "main" Zoom room. The drafting of sub-themes and resolutions took place in small groups in separate "breakout" rooms, according to the structured organizational process of the "world café". Like a "physical" "world café", each online world café breakout room would have a parliamentarian who volunteered to be the topic owner. The other parliamentarians would spend an allotted time (ca. 20 minutes) in each breakout room, drafting sub-themes or recommendations, and then switch breakout rooms at the end of the allotted time. The topic owner was responsible for addressing the topic at hand, as well as explaining the state of the debate to newly arriving participants. Care was taken to ensure that different participants fulfilled the role of topic owner.

To enable this process, three facilitators (Ernest Thaqi, Fiona Hendrych and Thomas Ernst) were each assigned to one of three breakout rooms. They assisted the groups in their deliberations and ensured that the parliamentarians switched rooms when the allotted time was over. The facilitators also had access to an online pinboard ("Miro"), which they let the parliamentarians see by sharing their screen. The facilitators used this online pinboard to provide the parliamentarians with a written record of their ideas, thereby encouraging the parliamentarians to move from discussion to idea formulation. In this way, the parliamentarians were not required to learn how to use the online pinboard themselves and could focus on their discussions, while the facilitators could gently structure the process when necessary. The character of the online pinboard – that all three facilitators were working across one shared online pinboard – provided the CP with a sense of parliamentarians collaborating across discussions in individual breakout rooms.

The small writing groups of the world café were reconstituted at the beginning of each days' session. When generating initial sub-themes in the second CP session, the groups were reconstituted between Zoom room sequences, enabling idea variation. When writing recommendations, the groups were kept the same and circulated to create consensus – the groups rotated through the rooms until they arrived back in their original room, ensuring that the original intent of the written recommendations and its altering could be reviewed.

The parliamentarians had chosen to have public voting on the recommendations. Voting occurred using the "reaction" tools offered by Zoom: Andreas Martin would read out each

recommendation and ask the parliamentarians to vote “agree”, “disagree” or “abstain” by clicking on either the “thumbs up”, “thumbs down”, or “coffee cup” symbol. The other facilitators would count and record the votes.

Each session began and ended with a check in/check out sequence, in which the participants could reflect on the session and the time between the sessions. Andreas Martin then spent the first ten minutes of each session repeating what the citizen parliament is about, reviewing past sessions, and giving an outlook on the day and the coming sessions. This served to review and reconfirm the consensus and talk the online CP into existence.

In terms of enabling the coming into being of the online CP, the first three sessions were used to familiarize the citizens (and the facilitators) with the online environment. The first session introduced the concept of breakout rooms for discussions in small groups. The second session introduced the world café format and the ensuing circling of parliamentarians between breakout rooms. The third session introduced the notion of recommendations, and writing of recommendations while circling around different breakout rooms. Parliamentarians moved from doing things in an online setting that were familiar (talking, brainstorming) to doing things that were unfamiliar (formulating recommendations). By the same token, the facilitators were also gradually familiarized with the online environment and its specificities.

Drawing on the experience of the Czech team, the design of the online CP prioritized the time allotted to the drafting of the resolutions. It was therefore decided that the sequence prior to the drafting of the recommendations during each of the three thematic sessions – the generating of sub-themes by the parliamentarians – would take place between sessions. Parliamentarians were encouraged to email suggestions for sub-themes to Andreas Martin, who would organize a vote on the list of sub-themes at the beginning each session. This procedure ensured that the parliamentarians would be able to develop further sub-themes during the CP process, while protecting the parliaments’ need for sufficient time to draft the recommendations.

In the course of the online CP, some changes were made to the script. Whereas the OEAW team had originally intended to have the four facilitators moderate four breakout rooms concurrently, it quickly became apparent that this was problematic in the online environment: someone was needed to monitor the logistics of synchronized switching of breakout rooms, and to ensure that all parliamentarians consistently moved from one room to the next. It proved to be effective to have the main facilitator facilitate the plenary sessions, and to have the three other facilitators facilitate the breakout rooms. It was also found that it was not technically possible to smoothly playback the three videos that offered introductions to the three thematic areas of the parliament produced by the MeDeMAP research team via the facilitators’ shared screen, frustrating the parliamentarians. It was therefore agreed by the parliamentarians that they would be responsible for watching the videos outside of the CP sessions.

After each session, Andreas Martin would send the parliamentarians an email with the minutes, a list of the resolutions and the voting record. After a cooling off period, Andreas Martin would send the parliamentarians links to the standardized feedback survey and the resolution feedback survey. All sessions were recorded. The parliamentarians gave their consent to the recordings and requested that they would be made available after the sessions. The recordings were duly made available and kept accessible for the parliamentarians to review for some time after the conclusion of the online CP process.

PART II:

NATIONAL REPORTS:

Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy

3 Czech Republic

Authors: Vaia Doudaki, Miloš Hroch and Štěpán Šanda (Charles University, CU)

Introduction

This report presents the main findings of the analysis of the material collected from the Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy activities and output, which took place during March–May 2025, as one of the MeDeMAP WP6 research components.

The analysis focuses on the roles, perspectives and activities of the citizen parliament's 20 participants and does not include those of the organisers or third parties. At the same time, basic information concerning the design, setup and operation of the citizen parliament is presented, together with core information regarding the methods and process of data collection, the collected corpus, and the methods and process of data analysis. Providing this core information, together with more detailed information regarding the organisation of the citizen parliaments and the methodology of data collection and analysis applied by all MeDeMAP research teams that have organised citizen parliaments, which is presented in the main part of the deliverable this national report is part of, allows to attest to, and evaluate the overall quality of the research, in terms, for instance, it validity and reliability (Cresswell, 2014; Rose & Johnson, 2020).

This report follows the common structure that was designed for all MeDeMAP research teams having organised citizen parliaments, to allow for the identification of main similarities and differences across partner countries, not as it concerns specific findings but regarding core issues, dimensions and themes around the WP6 two main research questions:

- RQ1: How do the citizen parliament participants envision the democratic roles of media in their recommendations / resolutions for future perspectives and in the process leading to these recommendations?
- RQ2: How are democracy and media constructed in the participatory process of the CP?

For this reason, the analysis of the Czech citizen parliament's material is structured around these two main research questions and their affiliated secondary research questions, following this commonly designed framework and order. Specific findings that might fall under more than one secondary research question are presented under primarily one section/secondary research question, to avoid extensive overlaps or repetitions. Still, where necessary, brief references to previously presented findings are made, to facilitate comprehension and to pinpoint to connections and interrelations in the analysis.

3.1 Organisational report

Timeframe

The Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy was structured around four full-day sessions and included learning, reflection and feedback cycles prior, in-between and after the four sessions, covering a three-month period (15 March, 5 April, 26 April, 17 May 2025).

Each citizen parliament session took place on a Saturday, lasted a full day (9:00 – 17:00) and included components of learning, groupwork, dialogue, reflection and deliberation. The first session played an introductory and agenda-setting role, while the outcome of each of the following sessions was a set of subtopics addressing aspects and dimensions of the three thematic areas (media systems, media representation, media participation), and a series of resolutions within each subtopic, formulating specific policy actions, measures, and/or solutions, to cater for the issues identified by the parliamentarians. In total, 31 resolutions were adopted by the citizen parliament participants, using a qualified majority of 2/3 of the votes.

After each citizen parliament session, the participants would engage in a series of activities taking place in the designated online citizen parliament platform: get access to the session's minutes; be invited to reflect on the session via a survey questionnaire, allowing for the core team of organisers and moderators to make adjustments to the upcoming sessions, attending to the participants' concerns and experiences; be invited to express both supportive and dissenting opinions for each voted resolution, allowing for both the majority and minority positions to be expressed not only during but also after each citizen parliament session.

Participants

The Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy was attended by 20 participants. Due to illness, individual participants could be absent on specific CP session days. The number of participants per citizen parliament day was 18, 19, 17, 18. As the aim was to have a diverse group of parliamentarians, with diverse socio-political profiles, and from different parts of the country, the call for participants was circulated broadly through news media, social media, university and civil society channels, during June 2024 – January 2025. Interested individuals could contact the citizen parliament organising team and were asked to fill out a questionnaire, which facilitated the recruitment of participants applying a series of diversity criteria. Shortlisted candidates were then interviewed by a member of the research team, and a final decision was taken by the parliament's organisers. The 20 citizen parliament participants were selected in February 2025, on the basis of diversity criteria related to gender, age, residence, educational and professional profile, political orientation and views regarding media and democracy. Their willingness to engage in constructive dialogue, and their commitment to attend and actively participate in all four meetings that took place in the March-May 2025 period, in Prague, Olomouc and Brno, were also used as selection criteria. Professional politicians and journalists were filtered out, so as not to disturb the dynamics of the citizen parliament.

Following these criteria, the parliament consisted of 14 female and 6 male participants; aged 19–77; students, employed or retired; with (in a few cases secondary and mainly university level) education in different sciences/disciplines; professional activity in various fields; based in 12 different parts of the Czech Republic; with varying degrees of interest in the news and in politics; with diverse views as it concerns social and political organisation. Some of the participants' profiles reflected to a certain extent aspects of the Czech society's ethnic or community diversity.

Location

The Czech citizen parliament was characterized by demographic, geographical and ideological diversity of its participants, aiming to reflect, to the extent that it was possible, the diversity of the Czech society. To further engage with the principle and practice of geographical diversity and facilitate the interactions of the participants with regional and local experts, the citizen parliament held sessions in three different Czech cities: Two sessions were held in Prague (on 15 March and 17 May 2025), one in Olomouc (on 5 April 2025) and one in Brno (on 26 April 2025). The specific cities were selected as they are located in different parts of the Czech Republic. Moreover, the core research team is based in Prague, having access to university facilities and infrastructure; Olomouc and Brno have also universities hosting Communication and Media Studies academic departments, which facilitated the arrangements regarding venues and local experts.

Moderators / Facilitators

Miloš Hroch and Karolína Šimková were the two Czech citizen parliament's moderators, facilitating the citizen parliament sessions and guiding the participants throughout the sessions' activities. The two moderators were researchers of the MeDeMAP project, and they were recruited on the basis of their familiarisation with the MeDeMAP research and its aims. The two moderators were supported by the two citizen parliament main coordinators, Nico Carpentier and Vaia Doudaki, throughout the entire process of the citizen parliament planning, organisation and operation, receiving continuous guidance and support, as needed. Moreover, the two moderators received moderation training: a. during a workshop focussing on the art of hosting, organized for all project partners organising citizen parliament, by COMMIT (4-6 December 2024, Vienna); b. by Jude McInerney (Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland) (11 February 2025, Prague).

Experts / Training

The citizen parliament included learning components, providing to the participants resources which would allow them to get information and knowledge about the three thematic areas of the citizen parliament (media systems, media representation and media participation), serving as sources of reference and of inspiration, when deliberating and formulating the resolutions.

Resources in the form of three videos produced by the MeDeMAP research team and a selection of Czech texts were made available to the participants prior to the first meeting of the citizen parliament, on the designated online platform for the CP participants, and remained available throughout its duration. The videos, that offered introductions to the three thematic areas of the parliament, were projected during the citizen parliament sessions and served as starting points for the lectures by Czech scholars and practitioners.

The Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy invited eight experts to the citizen parliament sessions. In each session, one academic and one professional expert elaborated on and unpacked further the key concepts, ideas and debates around the three thematic areas, using examples from the Czech context, and then engaged in conversation with the citizen parliament participants, around the topics they presented. The experts who joined the citizen parliament sessions were Dr. Vlastimil Nečas, Dr. David Klimeš, Dr. Karel Páral, Marek Zelenka,

Dr. Klára Smejkal, Jana Ustohalová, Dr. Miloš Hroch and Michaela Mašková (detailed information may be found in the Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy Resolutions Report, see Appendix A.1). These experts were briefed prior to the sessions about the overall theme and rationale of the citizen parliament and the specific thematic area of the session, which they would join. The experts were also given access to the video addressing the thematic area they would talk about, to be used by them as a source of inspiration. As this model was used successfully and was appreciated by the citizen parliament participants, it was maintained throughout the four CP sessions.

Script

The script that guided the organisation and operation of the Czech citizen parliament sessions was developed by the core research team at Charles University, led by Nico Carpentier. The core structure of the script was designed by Nico Carpentier, adhering to the MeDeMAP project's main principles and aims. It was then further developed by the research team at Charles University, adjusting the script to the specificities and modalities of the Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy.

The script provided detailed information for each specific activity taking place in each of the four days the CP sessions were held, providing clear information regarding: location, time, duration, activity, outcome, people involved/people responsible, equipment and materials and other arrangements needed.

The script provided detailed information also regarding the activities taking place before and after each CP session. This information concerned preparatory arrangements and room set-up, but also activities that involved the parliamentarians and which took place online (in the designated online citizen parliament platform), after each citizen parliament session, such as getting access to the citizen parliament session's minutes; reflecting on the session via a survey; expressing both supportive and dissenting opinions for each voted resolution.

The script underwent a series of revisions and adjustments during this 3-month period (resulting in 12 successive versions of the script), addressing the CP participants' experiences, reflection and feedback, but also the core team's (main organisers and moderators) experience during the process. These revisions aimed to improve organisation and operations, but also to take in consideration the participants' remarks and experiences throughout the process, adhering to a certain extent, to the principles of participatory action research (PAR) that the MeDeMAP citizen parliaments were informed by (Monnot et al., 2025b; See also Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Kindon et al., 2007; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020).

3.2 Analytical report

Data collection

The data collected and analysed for the purposes of this project were:

Ethnographic fieldnote reports produced by two observers

Two observers (Štěpán Šanda and Klára Odstrčilová) were recruited for the ethnographic part of the research (see Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). The two

observers, prior to the observation activities received dedicated training by one of the Czech citizen parliament coordinators and were in consultation with them throughout the process of data collection and reporting.

The two observers attended the entire duration of the four citizen parliament sessions and their activities. In each citizen parliament session, each one of the two observers focussed on collecting information concerning one of the two main research questions, and their three secondary research questions (see the next section of the report) and produced a fieldnote report based on their observations.

The ethnographic observation part of the research was important as it covered the activities of the citizen parliament that were not audio-recorded and captured the nuances of people's interactions that were difficult to register through any other method of data collection. Each observer submitted four fieldnote reports, one per citizen parliament session and main research question. These in total 8 fieldnote reports are together approximately 50 pages long.

Citizen parliament plenary session recordings

The audio recorded parts of the Czech CP sessions concerned the 'plenary' activities (the activities that involved all CP members); the activities taking place in small groups were not recorded. These audio recordings were content-analysed. To facilitate the analysis, key parts of these recordings were transcribed. The duration of these recording was in total approximately 16 hours (out of which the directly relevant time for the analysis was approximately 8 hours).

Citizen parliament session minutes

The minutes of each of the four CP sessions that were written by the CP moderators after each session. The minutes included key information about the session's activities, decisions and output. These four session minutes were together 25 pages in length.

Online surveys

The four surveys after each citizen parliament session, concerning the parliamentarians' experiences of each session. Each survey was composed of six questions and the number of participants per CP session who filled out the survey were 18, 13, 13 and 10. This resulted in 54 filled-out surveys, in total, and 324 single-answered questions in the four CP sessions. The survey questionnaire is attached as an appendix to this report (Appendix B.1).

Subtopics and resolutions

The 16 selected subtopics, 51 proposed resolutions, and 31 accepted resolutions (16 resolutions on media systems, nine resolutions on media representation and six resolutions on media participation). The Czech Citizen Parliament for Media and Democracy Resolutions are attached as an appendix to this report (Appendix A.1).

Dissenting and confirmatory opinions on the accepted resolutions

The responses by the parliamentarians expressing their opinions on each of the 31 accepted resolutions. Approximately half of the parliamentarians would provide comments on the

accepted resolutions each time, producing in total 321 confirmatory and dissenting opinions on these resolutions (See Table 3.1).

	Media Systems	Media representation	Media participation	Total
Accepted resolutions	16	9	6	31
Participants commenting	12	11	9	32
Number of comments	182	85	54	321

Table 3.1: Numbers of dissenting and confirmatory opinions on accepted resolutions

Post-citizen parliament interviews

Five interviews with citizen parliament participants, regarding their overall experience as parliamentarians, held after the completion of the CP operations. The interviewees were selected on the basis of diversity criteria concerning gender, age, overall satisfaction (both enthusiastic and more critical participants), activity level (both more engaged/talkative and less active/talkative parliamentarians), and their positions towards democracy and media. The interviews were held in person or online by one interviewer during 4–7 June 2025 and lasted 36–50 minutes (in total 210 minutes). The interviews were transcribed for the purposes of the analysis (the transcribed text was in total 52 pages). The interview guide for the post-citizen parliament interviews is attached as an appendix to this report (Appendix B.2).

Sensitising concepts employed in the coding process

A team of three researchers analysed the material of the Czech citizen parliament, as is described further-on. The team followed an abductive strategy (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Reichertz, 2019), maintaining an open approach to interacting with the data and coding, being still guided by a series of key theoretical-sensitising concepts, instructed by Nico Carpentier's and Jeffrey Wimmer's (2025) theoretical framework on democracy and media, which identifies core components, roles, struggles, threats and conditions of possibility for both democracy and media's connections to democracy. The specific sensitising concepts varied to a certain extent depending on the specific research question but largely centred around the key components listed in Table 3.2. Still, it shall be mentioned that as the research questions did not address explicitly conditions of possibility, these areas of analysis and their related sensitising concepts were considered as long as they were directly connected to the areas of analysis pertinent to the research questions.

Democracy	Media
Core	**Core**
Articulation of Participation and Representation	Articulation of Technology and Institution
Political Community (and State)	Audience
Liberalism	
	Roles
	Informational, watchdog, forum, representational, participatory role
Struggles	**Struggles**
Balance between Participation and Representation	Degree of Media Pluralism
Politics versus the Political	Degree of Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression
Procedural versus Substantive Democracy	Degree of Reductionist Representations
Defining the Political Community	Degree of Participatory Intensities
Conditions of possibility	**Conditions of possibility**
Material Decentralisations and Stabilities	Communication Technologies and Infrastructures as Resources
Legitimate State	Legitimacy of Democratic State Regulation as Counterweight
Active People	
Democratic Culture and Its Value-Discourses	Democratic Media Culture
Threats	**Threats**
Democracy's Unfulfilled Promises	Transformation of Political Knowledge
Non-Participation	Disenchantment and Lack of Trust
(Re)centralisation of Power	Colonisation of the Public Sphere
	Lack of Economic Sustainability
Closing Down the 'Corral'	
Violence, Antagonistic Other(ing)s and War	Increase of Symbolic Violence and Polarisation

Table 3.2: Overview of core components, roles, struggles, conditions of possibility and threats (adjusted version of Figure 3.2 in Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, p. 99)

Specific sensitising concepts related to participation and power originated also from Carpentier's (2016) framework of analysing participatory intensities, including, among others, involved actors' levels of engagement and participation, positions of authority, decision-making, levels of control over the process, and minimalist-maximalist participation.

The analytical process in and across research teams

Three researchers, who are also the authors of this report, analysed the collected material of the Czech citizen parliament (Vaia Doudaki, Miloš Hroch, Štěpán Šanda) with one of these researchers (Vaia Doudaki) acting as coordinator. The material was analysed 'manually', that is without the use of software, following the main principles of textual analysis (Saldaña, 2013; Yin, 2016). Each of the three researchers analysed all the material (with the exception of the

citizen parliament plenary session recordings)[5], each coding for specific secondary research questions. There was also partial overlap in the coding focus (i.e. secondary research questions), to enhance the consistency and overall quality of coding within the team. The team engaged in a process of repeated cycles of coding and discussions among the team, leading to coding synchronisation and revisions in the produced coding trees.

Collecting and analysing all the parliament-related material, as described above, adhered to the principle of triangulation (of collected data, of data collection methods and of diversity of researchers involved), serving as a strategy and tool of assuring research quality (for the principle and practice of triangulation, see, e.g., Denzin, 2015; Fusch et al., 2018).

In parallel, the team attended three training online meetings (4 June, 17 June, 11 September 2025) organised by the MeDeMAP CP analysis coordinator Andreas Martin (Austrian Academy of Sciences, OEAW). These meeting focussed on training on coding and coding trees calibration and synchronisation across all the MeDeMAP research teams having organised citizen parliaments.

The training meetings, the discussions with the other research teams regarding the coding process and the coding outcomes (coding trees), but also the presentation of the findings of the analysis on a dedicated session during the last MeDeMAP consortium meeting (25.09.2025, St. Pölten) allowed us to validate, enrich and refine our analysis, identifying both similarities across countries, but also specificities related the particularities of the Czech context.

Moreover, after the analysis was completed, it was shared with the citizen parliament participants for their reflections and input. In addition to adhering to the principles of transparency in academic research, inviting the parliamentarians to provide feedback on the analysis allowed us to consider their perspectives, thereby enriching and validating our findings. Although this invitation did not result in specific suggestions for changes to the analysis, it did generate reflections from the parliamentarians on the broader socio-political context and media landscape in the Czech Republic, as well as on the limitations of the broader impact of the resolutions produced by the Czech citizen parliament. This feedback will be taken into consideration in future academic publications beyond this national report, when addressing the Czech media and socio-political context, as well as the challenges faced by such projects and initiatives in achieving broader socio-political impact.

3.3 Constructions of media and democracy: Theoretical grounding

The analysis regarding media's democratic roles and the constructions of democracy and media in the activities, operation and outputs of the Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy was instructed by Carpentier's and Wimmer's theoretical framework (2025), as already mentioned in the previous section, and which addresses the democracy-media nexus from a discursive-material approach.

[5] The only exception were the citizen parliament plenary session recordings. These were partly transcribed by two of the researchers (each transcribing two CP sessions) and then fully coded and analyzed by these two researchers. The third researcher analyzed specific coded parts (directly related to specific secondary research questions), which were provided by the two other researchers.

In their work, the authors identify key components, roles, struggles, threats and conditions of possibility for both democracy and media's connections to democracy. This comprehensive framework was used as a guide in the coding and overall analysis of the collected material.

The analysis was further instructed by relevant literature focussing on participation and power relations (see, e.g., Carpentier, 2016; Carpentier & Patyn, 2007; Foucault, 1978/1990), allowing us to unpack further nuances and aspects of participatory dynamics, power relations and societal struggle pertaining to the construction and performance of democracy, and media's roles and connections.

Out of the vast field of literature on democracy and media, this section briefly addresses key concepts and components that were directly relevant to the analysis of the Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy.

Constructions of, and struggles around, democracy

Democracy, broadly defined, may be seen as "a form of government" (Held, 1996, p. 1) which incorporates, through diverse models, the rule by the people, entailing concepts and practices of "a political community in which there is some form of political equality among the people."

Democracy, for Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, p. 7) is constructed around "the co-presence of representation (or the delegation of power) and participation (or the sharing of power)", and the struggles over the balance between representation and participation. As the authors explain, "[p]olitical representation is grounded in the formal delegation of power, where specific actors are authorized by others" (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, p. 7) to act and to exercise power, through instruments and procedures, such as elections. Political participation then "refers to the involvement of the citizenry within (institutionalized) politics, ranging from voting in elections to political activism" (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, p. 7). The authors then refer to Held's (1996) typology of democratic models, and his description of these struggles:

> "Within the history of the clash of positions lies the struggle to determine whether democracy will mean some kind of popular power (a form of life in which citizens are engaged in *self*-government and *self*-regulation) or an aid to decision-making (a means to legitimate the decisions of those voted into power)" (Held, 1996, p. 3 – emphasis in original).

As it became already clear, the different approaches to the balance between representation and participation inform different models of democratic governance but also attribute different weight to each of these model's constituent components. For instance, in the broadly established model of liberal democracy, and its main components of the state, political community, rule of law, democratic procedures, citizens' rights and freedoms, there are still internal struggles around e.g. procedural or substantive democracy (e.g., privileging voting or more direct forms of participation in decision making); majoritarian (majority rule) or consociational democracy (communal democracy (federalism, grand coalitions, communities/minorities represented/co-decide)); representative democracy (e.g., parliamentary democracy) or direct democracy (citizen initiatives, referenda); strong/full consensus, enhanced majority or simple majority; politics or the political (emphasis on formal/institutional politics – the state/government as the main responsible actor, or on direct citizen involvement in, e.g., regional governance or community affairs) (see Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, pp. 10–20).

These approaches and their related struggles align with processes and practices that favour different participatory intensities (and intensities of power delegation and power-sharing) along the minimalist–maximalist axis, as presented in the table below:

Minimalist democratic participation	Maximalist democratic participation
Focussing on representation and delegation of power	Balancing representation and participation
Participation limited to elite selection	Attempting to maximise participation
Focussing on macro-participation	Combining macro-and micro-participation
Narrow definition of politics as institutionalized politics	Broad definition of the political as a dimension of the social

Table 3.3: The minimalist versus maximalist dimension of democratic participation. Source: Carpentier and Wimmer, 2025, p. 12 (see also Carpentier, 2011 p. 17)

Carpentier's (2011; 2016) typology of participatory intensities, as it is captured in Table 3.3, is instructed by a political studies approach to participation, which sees participation as a process of equalising power relations, thus not limiting participation to access (in a field, process) or interaction (among different actors in a process or activity). Such an approach involves examining the participating actors' roles and tasks, their levels of activity and involvement, their positions of authority and decision-making, and the overall levels of control over the process.

Constructions of media

The main media constructions that are of relevance to our analysis are *media as institution*, *as industry*, *as technology*, *as public sphere* and *as public good*.

For Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, p. 45) media are

> "assemblages that include communication technologies but simultaneously articulate these machines with the signifying practices that circulate through them and with the (institutionalized) organisational structures that produce these signifying practices and make them circulate, allowing media to support communicative action (Hepp, 2013, p. 1ff.)"

This approach allows to unpack and address key constructions of the media that relate to their "(institutionalised) organisational structures" and their "signifying practices". First, *media-as-institution* reflects ideas of (news) media's key function as pillars of democracy when it comes, for instance, to their construction as the fourth estate (related in turn to the media's watchdog role – see below), as an independent institution of equal relevance and weight to the other key state powers (executive, judiciary, legislative) (see, e.g., Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, pp. 55-56; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; Standaert, 2022; Trappel & Tomaz, 2021). Within a critical vein, media-as-institution constructions see media as not only monitoring the performance of other institutions, but as spaces mediating or co-constructing societal discourses or as functioning as an ideological apparatus themselves (see, for some of these debates, Barnett & Townend, 2015; Christians et al., 2009; McQuail, 1992; 1994).

The *media-as-industry* constructions focus on media's economic or profit-oriented aspects and address issues of economic sustainability, resource restrains, media dependence or

independence, but also aspects of media ownership and concentration (see, e.g., Bleyer-Simon et al., 2023; Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, p. 76; Doyle, 2002; Just, 2009; Papathanassopoulos et al., 2021).

Constructions of *media as technologies* focus on media's technological-material infrastructures for media's operation, content creation and dissemination. The focus on media as technologies often addresses the impact of the technologies in question on perception and communicative experience, but also on practices and phenomena such as polarisation or surveillance (see, e.g., Doudaki et al., 2024; Hepp & Krotz, 2014; Morozov, 2011; Van Bavel et al., 2021; Zuboff, 2019).

Another main construction of *media is as (part of the) public sphere*. The concept of the public sphere, coined by Habermas (1974; 1989), broadly describes spaces, processes and practices through which people "assemble to form a public body", where they discuss "matters of general interest" (Habermas, 1974, p. 49) through reasoned deliberation. The media are seen as one of the key spaces where such discussions take place. A democratic public sphere, as Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, p. 50) argue,

> "contributes to the distribution of political information, generates tools for opinion-formation, and enables political deliberation and participation, and the discursive justification and exercise of power by the people. In addition, the public sphere allows for a certain degree of communicative mediation … between state institutions, on the one hand, and the citizens—individually and organized within civil society—on the other hand."

Finally, construction of *media as public good* focus on media's informational, educational and cultural functions that often transcend or go beyond institutional or public sphere related constructions. Such a focus is often connected with arguments supporting the relevance of public service media or community media (see, e.g., Bellardi et al., 2018; Biringer et al., 2022; Kammer, 2016; Thomass et al., 2022).

Media's democratic roles and conditions of possibility

These main approaches to what media are, feed into and are informed by, a series of approaches concerning media's expected duties or aspired roles serving democracy. The main identified such roles are *the informational role*, *the watchdog/control role*, *the forum role*, *the representational role* and *the participatory role* (see Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, pp. 52-64).

The informational role primarily sees news media as satisfying citizens' information needs and offering the foundation for the formation of 'political opinions' (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, pp. 53-55). By performing this role, media support democracy by "facilitating the free and transparent formation of individual political positions" and they do so by "gathering, selecting and disseminating news on matters of general importance" (ibid.). It relates to values such as media freedom, transparency and high standards of journalistic practice.

The watchdog/control role is defined as monitoring or controlling power holders, particularly through investigative journalism, aimed at institutionalized politics or key players in the economy (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, p. 55). With the advent of more participatory online media, not only professional journalists are expected to perform this role, but also non-professional journalists or citizens themselves may undertake monitorial tasks.

According to *the forum role*, media contribute to democracy by facilitating a forum that allows for a "competitive exposure of alternative viewpoints" (McQuail, 1994, p. 129 as cited in Carpentier and Wimmer, 2025, p. 56). The role of media as forum relates to the theory of public sphere, where relevant problems are discussed and potential solutions are suggested through cooperation and deliberation. Authors also connect the forum role with the "weakening of the hegemony of journalistic curation" (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, p. 58), which enables the circulation of "non-journalistically curated content".

The representational role is linked to broad or universalised value discourses such as peace, freedom, equality, dignity, or justice, and emphasises the need for equal and accurate representations of societal groups, including migrants and women (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, pp. 59-61).

The participatory role is defined as the activation of citizens' communication rights, involving ordinary, non-elite, and non-professional actors in media-making or politics, whether at the institutional level or in community or art contexts. Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, p. 62) describe the media's democratic role as "offering—curated or noncurated—material platforms that facilitate this active citizenship and that fairly and respectfully represent it." Carpentier (2016) elsewhere distinguishes between participation *in the media* (involvement in the media-making process, for instance via the local newspaper or community radio) and *through the media* (employing available media channels for participation in public debate, facilitating macro-participation in the social). Different media organisations allow for varying levels of participation in and through the media; for instance, community media enable maximalist participation in the media, while formats such as letters-to-the-editor allow minimalist participation.

These roles are enabled by processes that transcend the media organisations and are situated in the larger social and political realm, for instance constituted by the state, such as media laws, frameworks of financial support or regulations. These processes can be labelled as *conditions of possibility* (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, pp. 20-21). Doudaki et al. (2025, p. 2), guided by the work of Carpentier and Wimmer (2025), identified four main conditions of possibility for media's democratic roles: communication technologies, economic resources and stability, democratic media culture and the legitimacy of democratic regulation.

Findings and analysis

The next two sections present the findings of the analysis of the material collected out of the Czech citizen parliament, as described in sections 3.1–3.2, being theoretically instructed by the framework presented in section 3.3. The analysis synthesised the findings on the basis of the project's main research areas, hence the findings of all data types were clustered together based on thematic relevance, as described above, addressing the project's main research questions (and their affiliated secondary research questions):

- Research Question 1 (section 3.4): How do the citizen parliament participants envision the democratic roles of media in their recommendations / resolutions for future perspectives and in the process leading to these recommendations?
- Research Question 2 (section 3.5): How are democracy and media constructed in the participatory process of the Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy?

3.4 Findings and analysis: Research question 1

Research question 1: How do the citizen parliament participants envision the democratic roles of media in their recommendations / resolutions for future perspectives and in the processes leading to these recommendations?

Secondary Research Questions:

a) What articulations of the media's democratic roles did the participants in the CP prioritise, which were omitted and which received only limited attention?
b) Which recommendations on future perspectives received consensus within the CP? Which future perspectives were the object of political struggle, and which ideological perspectives structured these differences?
c) How balanced were the power relations that characterized the process of producing the recommendations of the CP? How was conflict handled during the process? How was collaboration achieved during the process?

Media's democratic roles in the Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy

Through our analysis of the resolutions and the activities of the Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy, we identified the presence of all five key democratic media roles, as introduced in the previous section (informational role, control/watchdog role, forum role, representational role and participatory role, see Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025), envisioned by the Citizen Parliament participants, although in different intensities. No other roles were identified.

In our analysis of the Czech CP, the informational role was often articulated through the importance of local/regional media as a crucial source of information on political issues on municipal level. The watchdog role was envisioned through the prism of investigative journalism (specifically in town hall newspapers) and through citizen participation. The forum role received limited attention, as the audience's public feedback was based on the principles of deliberative democracy, i.e., as a forum within public service media (PSM) that allows people to deliberate about the PSM's governance or its content. The representational role was linked to the enhancement of journalistic and editorial work as part of the diversity strategies within the media organisations. Additionally, values such as inclusivity (in media format and tone of reporting) or social change were repeatedly mentioned, as media should be able to communicate visions for positive societal change and stimulate political imagination. Finally, according to our analysis, the media's participatory role could be performed more effectively if the country's media environment facilitated synergies between different types of media (for instance, between community media or local newspapers and mainstream media), which could also enable better mentoring or knowledge sharing among different types of journalists.

Two conditions of possibility – economic stability and democratic regulation – repeatedly came into discussion during the Czech CP, receiving also high levels of consensus, as it regards the suggested recommendations and ways forward. Economic stability was seen as a condition for strengthening media independence on various levels, also in their resolutions, participants called for establishing frameworks for financing local, regional and community media. Additionally, the regulation of media ownership, a particularly pressing issue in the Czech media

landscape (for instance, in the case of the media business of newly re-elected Prime Minister Andrej Babiš), was seen as crucial so that media can better fulfil their democratic roles.

SRQ1a: Articulations of the media's democratic roles prioritised

The informational, participatory, and representational democratic media roles were prioritized in the Czech citizen parliament. Still, it should be noted that the related themes of these roles were partly prioritized by the very structure of the citizen parliament, as two of the four sessions were dedicated to media representation and participation (and their connection to democracy). Out of the five identified roles, the watchdog role and the forum role received limited attention, being addressed less frequently, but also being articulated by less elements, than the other three roles.

Informational role

During the discussions among the parliamentarians, the informational role was connected to news media and often defined through journalistic standards or a desire for objectivity, constructed through "objectivity's components of factuality, relevance, truth(fullness), impartiality, balance and neutrality" (Westerståhl, 1983, as cited in Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, p. 54).

Protection of journalistic standards and journalists

Citizen parliament participants identified the key challenges of maintaining journalistic standards as follows: *"Maintain independence, objectivity and accuracy of information"* (E1/CP2).[6] For this role to be performed effectively, there is need for more efficient protection of

[6] This referencing system was implemented to quote the analysed material:

	Code	Examples
Participants	P1–P20*	
CP sessions	CP1–CP4	
Ethnographic report RQ1 **Ethnographic report RQ2**	E1 E2	E1/CP4
Interviews	I1–I5*	
Audio – Plenary sessions	AP	AP/CP2
Surveys	S1–S4	
Minutes per CP session	M1-M4	
Media systems- Resolutions **Media representation – Resolutions** **Media participation – Resolutions**	MSR1–16 MRR1–9 MPR 1–6	MSR16; MRR3
Resolution opinions	Resolution code-Op	MSR16-Op

Table 3.4: Referencing system of (quoted) analysed material

*To further anonymize participants' contributions, the numeric codes allocated to participants and to the interviews have been removed from the reporting of the findings.

journalistic standards but also of journalists themselves. As one participant emphasised, *"the protection of journalists is essential for democracy"* (MSR6-Op). Some participants were highly informed, and aware that the European Commission issued a directive in 2024 on protection against SLAPP lawsuits, which member states are to transpose by 2026. Two resolutions, linked to the topic of media systems, addressed the protection of journalists and their access to public information. Based on these resolutions, the Parliament of the Czech Republic should approve legislation that will expedite the handling of SLAPP lawsuits against journalists (MSR6) and prevent delays in providing information (MSR15).

Local/regional media as an important source of information on political issues (on the municipal level)

The CP highlighted the informational role of local and regional media, often in connection with the role of controlling powerholders. The following quote illustrates the importance of local, municipal media: *"If they banned the townhall papers in our village, there would be riots"* (E1/CP2). At the same time, given that townhall newspapers are often the only source of information in a given area, the decline of independent local media was identified as a problem by the participants, who argued for their support by the state.

Media literacy (against disinformation)

Another topic that emerged from the CP analysis was how media literacy (in combating disinformation) could strengthen the informational role of media in democracy, also through specific interventions in education. Two resolutions (MRR8 and MRR9) addressed media literacy in education, while other resolutions focussed on journalists' continuous education (MPR2) and media collaborations through content and experience exchanges (MPR1), which were framed as *"one of the ways to provide quality information to the public"* (MPR1-Op). Elsewhere, media literacy was described as a shield against the influx of disinformation, as it teaches people to distinguish the relevance of different information sources (E1/CP3).

Traditional media (as an anchor in the fluid digital world)

Another topic which is closely related to the previous one concerns issues of trust and distrust. Traditional news media emerged as more trustworthy and credible than social media (E1/CP2), and as a compass that may help publics navigate the fluid informational flows online.

Representational role

Diversity strategies (on the level of media institutions)

The representational role was articulated through the topic of diversity strategies (at the level of media institutions), which address editorial work, the composition of editorial teams, and – to some extent – storytelling (somewhat connected to editorial work). For instance, one resolution (MRR5) recommended that the directors general of public service media take measures to support the diversity of their teams and set goals in that direction.

Editorial teams: diverse journalistic profiles and identities

As it comes to the editorial teams, the CP participants envisioned that the engagement of journalists with diverse profiles and identities, of, for instance, journalists with different class

experiences, professionals from religious or ethnic minorities or members of the Roma community in the Czech Republic, could enrich the reporting in terms of tone, sensitivity, and range of topics, representing thus the diversity and pluriformity of the Czech society better. This touches upon also the informational role, as more diverse editorial teams can inform better.

Editorial work: framing, storytelling and experts/panellists

In relation to editorial work, the CP analysis showed the importance of framing and inclusion of experts/panellists in the news media coverage. During discussions about representation, one participant expressed the frustration about the reporting of ongoing wars and emphasised the moral and ethical aspect of reporting, pointing to potential biases, supporting one side of the conflict: *"Do not manipulate for your own good, don't work with stereotypes, do not dehumanise the casualties of war"* (AP/CP1). Additionally, the editorial teams should work more closely with a diversity of experts and panellists, as another participant explained: *"Journalists should be more motivated to look for interviewees and experts who do not always hold one point of view"* (MRR7-Op). One participant described the aspect of storytelling as *"the need to find ways to tell the stories of people from the margins of the country or society"* (MPR2-Op), so as to avoid the narrow framing of complex issues. Storytelling relates to the demand that people and different social groups are represented fairly and correctly. It was expressed by one participant in other words: *"Do not cultivate a monopoly on truth. Be responsive to the public and do not distort concepts"* (E1/CP1).

Political imagination

The CP participants not only envisioned the representational role through the pluralist and inclusive representation of vulnerable social groups but also believed that communicating a vision for social change – or political imagination – is important. In that regard, the media coverage should *"lean more towards positive information"* and *"encourage imagination about how to change the world"* (E1/CP1), reflecting visions of hope and positive change. This component, again, touches upon media's informational role, as it relates to fair and accurate information about these issues presented to the public.

Participatory role

The idea that *"broader citizen involvement cultivates democracy"* (MPR6-Op) set the foundation on how participants envisioned the participatory role of media in democracy. Some of them encountered concepts related to community media, which were introduced during the expert talks and videos, for the first time, still were highly supportive of smaller scale media with greater participatory intensities. Relatedly, the CP voted for resolutions that recommended setting up the frameworks for financing independent, regional and community media (MSR3, MSR11) and repeatedly voiced support for media where the opinions of citizens could be amplified.

Participation in: Ways of mentoring and sharing knowledge, diverse citizen journalistic identities and non-professional & professional cross-media synergies

The CP participants agreed on the importance of changing the media environment adequately, so that community and regional media can grow. Concretely, one gap they identified and aimed to address was in developing more effective ways of mentoring and sharing knowledge (MPR1).

For instance, they envisioned (MPR3) state-supported training programs (like the already existing Simulator of Journalism organized by the regional website Naše Broumovsko), which would educate interested individuals from different socio-economic groups, so they could become journalists and external contributors to, for instance, regional media. As one participant commented: *"I agree, this is a way to wider involvement of the public. And thus, to democratisation of the media environment"* (MPR3-Op).

This would also contribute to stimulating more diverse citizen journalist identities; as already mentioned, such a demand for more diverse editorial teams and journalists working across media types was a recurring theme in the CP analysis. Another measure for the growth of community and regional media, as the CP participants imagined, would be support for continuous non-professional and professional cross-media synergies – something that could stimulate the sharing of knowledge and skills, enhance diversity in who produces media content, and generally enrich the media ecosystem.

Transparency (participation through media councils)

The CP participants argued for greater transparency in the governance of media councils (on different levels), as lower barriers contribute to greater participation – parliamentarians especially mentioned how politics also influence the election processes in media councils. However, the barriers remain, as one participant described their feelings: *"Media councils have always seemed like a very distant world to ordinary citizens"* (E1/CP2). The CP participants recommended, for instance, attempts to de-politicise these electoral processes (MSR5), allowing for greater citizen participation in these councils, and hence greater citizen participation through the media field.

Watchdog role

The discussion about the watchdog role was framed by one of the expert's input, whose work focussed on investigating political biases and conflicts of interest in townhall newspapers. The CP participants shared their own experiences with reading the townhall newspapers and expressed how difficult it can be to criticise the local political leaders – so the topics of the watchdog role through regional investigative journalism, as well as social monitoring through citizen participation/citizen journalism emerged. To illustrate the latter, one participant expressed that it is hard to get one's voice heard in the newspapers: *"How do you let people know when you want to comment in the townhall papers, where they tell you that it doesn't fit anymore, and it only comes out when the problematic project has already been approved?"* (E1/CP2). For another participant, the problem lies in the almost non-existent regional investigative journalism: *"What I miss is regional investigative work. It [local affairs] may appear in Ve stínu or Černé ovce [examples of an investigative podcast and public service programme on Czech television], but it often stays disconnected from the lived experiences of the affected people. If the feature was embedded in regional media, maybe it would be closer to the people"* (E1/CP2).

Forum role

Even though the citizen parliament participants repeatedly mentioned the importance of facilitating public debate, the forum role received only limited attention (although partially, and not explicitly, it fed into the articulation of the participatory role). The CP explored the idea of

an audience forum as a platform based on the principles of deliberative democracy. This would enable audiences to voice their opinions and ideas on both the content and governance of the media organisation. Such *"a periodic open forum"* as was described in the respective resolution, *"will collect feedback through discussion on what topics appear in the media. This body will operate on the basis of the principles of deliberative democracy and participants will be selected to represent different social groups"* (MRR6).

The CP participants expressed their concerns about whether all social groups would be invited, whether such a platform would be dominated by extremist opinions and whether such a forum could be sustained. The response to some of these sceptic voices emphasised the class aspect, arguing that the gap between lower and elite classes in the country has been widening: *"It should include the voices of a factory worker, a farmer and a cleaning lady. It's about citizen participation and it should really take all different citizen perspectives"* (AP/CP3).

SRQ1b: Consensus and political struggle over future perspectives

Consensus on future perspectives for media supporting democracy

Among the recommendations on future perspectives that received consensus within the CP were topics such as stronger and independent public service media (PSM), support for community/regional/local media, and the protection of journalistic standards and work. The strong agreement on these issues was founded on a broader consensus regarding the premise of media's democratic remit – the core assumption that media hold key democratic roles and functions in society.

The fact that such a diverse group of people was able to come to a consensus on issues that tend to be polarising is analytically significant, as it may be pointing to the positive impact of deliberative practices for overcoming disparities in society (or, it might be connected to the specific synthesis of the citizen parliament's participants).

A stronger role of PSM was widely accepted and the CP participants often argued that the PSM are important bastions in the information war, as one member said: *"I believe, we are in an information war. We urgently need independent public service media that exist and are not paid by politics or by lobbyists"* (MSR10-Op). Sustainable financing was seen as crucial for PSM to fulfil their democratic roles. Similarly, the CP reached a consensus that independent regional, local and community media need more substantial support, as they are *"threatened by the instability of income"* (MSR3-Op). The CP participants also widely accepted the measure against the concentration of media ownership (*"Adopt measures against oligopolies and monopolies in the media sector"*, MSR2), echoing the provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (Article 22), which outlines the assessment of mergers in the media market.

Struggles

Several recommendations and resolutions were the object of (political) struggle, reflecting diverging ideological positions. The main areas of struggle reflected 1) interventionist vs libertarian positions concerning media regulation, 2) utopian (or idealistic) vs realistic approaches to citizen/societal/political demands, 3) approaches arguing for bureaucratic efficiency vs warning against increasing bureaucratic powerfulness.

One of area of struggle concerned media regulation of public and commercial media. While PSM were constructed as regulatable media organisations, commercial media organisations, as some participants argued, should be left to the invisible hand of the market and the state should not intervene: *"I think that private media, in order to be competitive, should not be subject to unnecessary obstacles in their business, which can be circumvented anyway, and would only create a 'cosmetic' obstacle"* (MSR1-Op). On the other hand, community media were seen as something that deserves the support of the state: *"The state should make it known that it cares for participation"* (MPR5-Op).

The second area of struggle concerned the feasibility of the proposed resolutions. Participants argued – when refining the formulations of resolutions – that some of the recommendations might be utopian or too idealistic and drifted towards more realistic formulations. For instance, the voted resolution concerning the *"[c]reation of a system (by law) of financing independent, regional and community media"* (MSR3), received the following feedback by one participant: *"I agree, even though the resolution seems slightly utopian to me. If it could be realistically implemented, it would be absolutely fundamental and important"* (MSR3-Op).

Also, when arguing about resolutions, the CP participants often assessed the efficiency of recommendations and whether they are not only adding to the already strong bureaucracy. As one participant explained, the creation of a position of a PSM *"diversity manager"* would be superfluous: *"I believe that the new specialized position does not solve the problem. The key is the will of management and the editorial style of work"* (MRR1-Op).

SRQ1c: Power relations within the process of the Citizen Parliament

For the examination of the parliamentarians' power relations, our analysis was guided by Carpentier's (2016) approach, which involves examining their roles and tasks, the levels of activity and involvement and participation, their positions of authority, but also decision-making, and the overall levels of control over the process.

Balanced power relations and varied participatory intensities

The *power relations* between the parliamentarians during the citizen parliament sessions were overall *balanced*. All parliamentarians acted based on the recognition of equality in their roles and responsibility. Moreover, they agreed that all members' opinions and positions have equal weight *("There is no bad opinion"*, M1), and they should be given the space to be shared, as it was decided and validated via the mutually agreed discussion rules during the first CP session.

Participants held in principle equal power positions as it concerns engagement in tasks, activities, and deliberation. At the same time, not all participants fully engaged in the processes of dialogue and deliberation, or the intensity of their involvement and participation varied. Some participants appeared to be more active than others, taking the lead more often in initiating dialogues or proposing subtopics and resolutions. As one parliamentarian noted, *"the power relations were pretty balanced, although some of the CP members had a stronger voice"* (I).

Still, it should be noted that the degree of involvement, or the time a participant took to speak, was not related to dominance in a straightforward way. Less talkative participants argued that they only spoke when they had something to say. As one participant reflected:

> *"In some [general conversations], it seemed to me that I did not have much to offer and was a bit passive. On the contrary, in the moments of group work on expanding subtopics and especially in the first round of creating resolutions, I was, in my opinion, a valid active member in formulating and thinking up proposals"* (S2).

Others were careful not to disrupt the ongoing dialogue (*"I can think of another topic, but I didn't want to disrupt the discussion"*, E1/CP1). Others, while they did not always propose new subtopics or resolutions, were active in facilitating the dialogue, acting as moderators.

Expertise and ordinariness

Through their engagement in the discussions and overall activities of the parliament, its members would often identify for themselves – or were connected with, by other members of the group – a certain *expertise*, based on their education, professional or more general experience with certain topics (related e.g., to education or media) *("I have experience with student parliaments"*; *"I started multiple [NGOs]"*, *"I speak from experience"*, E2/CP1). For instance, one parliamentarian reflected about their own contribution in the first citizen parliament session: *"Thanks to my knowledge of the media and general knowledge, I was able to contribute to the discussion with both specific facts and a broader perspective. I felt that people listened and the discussion was conducted with respect"* (S1). In a lot of these cases, the performance and acknowledgment of authority through expertise had the capacity to positively influence the discussion, creating a sense of safety among the group regarding the quality of the parliament's work. As one participant reflected: *"I especially appreciate those who are knowledgeable about the topic and can often give the discussion a 'direction'"* (S2).

Reversely, the (self-)perception of lack of expertise was at times connected to more limited involvement. Through these (self)identifications, *ordinariness* was constructed as non-expertise, through the denial or rejection of expertise *("I am a layperson"*, E2/CP1), or through the performance of modesty, insecurity, or lack of confidence, as indicated in one survey response: *"Almost the entire time, it seemed to me that I was not bringing any benefit. In the end, I managed to assert one point, because of which I wanted to participate, and I am very glad that I succeeded. I hope that I will be able to contribute more"* (S1). Ordinariness was also performed through a self-reflection about own limitations: *"Personally, my contribution was probably the smallest of all the sessions so far, because the topic of media participation is the least familiar to me [...] But I'm glad I could at least contribute a little"* (S4). At the same time, ordinariness was also validated, as the citizen parliament functioned as a space where (ordinary) citizen participation in democratic processes was affirmed and celebrated. One of the participants explained that they were glad to be participating in the citizen parliament, where *"us as normal citizens can also have a say"* (E2/CP1). Moreover, as one parliamentarian argued, participants

> *"who don't deal with the media professionally, needed to feel some more support, that what they think is completely fine and that they don't actually need any expertise to formulate those opinions. That it's not about someone understanding exactly who should decide what, but that it's about saying: 'we wish the media wouldn't do this and do this'. And for that, you don't need to have a media connection, in my opinion, the viewer's perception is enough, and it's extremely important to know what this or that informed viewer thinks".* (I)

Decision-making and control over the process

When it comes to *decision-making*, which is a key component of power performance, the parliamentarians decided on their own about how the parliament shall reach its decisions, during the first parliament session. The model selected by the parliamentarians of deciding through consensus on procedural matters, and voting through enhanced majority (2/3) and public vote on the selected resolutions, showed a preference for public deliberation and, if possible, consensus, reflecting an egalitarian approach to decision-making (The decision-making processes and struggles are elaborated further-on in the analysis, in the sections concerning the construction of democracy).

Finally, it shall be acknowledged that while the parliamentarians' power positions were internally enhanced and rather balanced, that is within the citizen parliament operation and activities, the parliamentarians did not participate in and thus lacked any control over the citizen parliament design, its set-up, and the selection of its participants. Hence, while the citizen parliament was designed integrating several of the principles of participatory action research (Monnot et al., 2025b; See also Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Kindon et al., 2007; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020), allowing for iterative feedback by the participants, which would feed into several revisions and adjustments during the process, still, participatory action research was not implemented at the stages of the CP design and set-up.

Collaboration and conflict

As it concerns how collaboration and conflict were handled by the parliamentarians of the Czech citizen parliament, the discussions, deliberation and decision making were characterised by mutual respect and a collaborative spirit. All the participants would address each other informally, using informal language (were on first-name terms), indicating a collegial attitude and approach. Part of the collegial and respectful attitude was also a reflective approach towards one's own behaviour. As it was described in one of the ethnographic reports, a participant apologized for being *"too expressive"* when discussing a topic in the previous CP session, *"and promised they would listen more during the sessions. Others however mentioned they did not remember the participant being too expressive"* (E2/CP2).

Overall, *resistance*, either concerning the CP structure and operation, or the dialogue, deliberation and decision-making processes was not manifested in confrontational ways, but rather either through disagreement, opinion or feedback sharing.

In the cases where diverging opinions were expressed, they were not devalued by the members who did not support them. Moreover, severe or highly disruptive conflict was not observed nor mentioned by the participants themselves. In the instances of minor conflict or tension, again, the participants' actions and interactions were guided by the principles of respect and responsibility, engaging in tension-reducing strategies, not letting conflict escalate. While at times the parliamentarians experienced some frustration, due to disagreement, or time pressure, they were still fully aware that collaboration entails compromise and acknowledged: *"That is the form of raw democracy, even with mistakes!"* (AP/CP2). Their sense of respect concerned the other parliamentarians and their positions, but also the procedure and the format of the citizen parliament, which will be elaborated on in the next analysis section concerning participation.

3.5 Findings and analysis: Research question 2

Research Question 2: How are democracy and media constructed in the participatory process of the citizen parliament?

Secondary Research Questions:

a) How is participation performed in the CP? Which (sub)processes are forms of minimalist / maximalist participation?
b) How is democracy constructed in the CP? Which core components are accepted (or not), and how do the citizens in the CP position themselves towards the relevant political struggles and threats?
c) How are media constructed in the CP? Which core components are accepted (or not), and how do the citizens in the CP position themselves towards the relevant political struggles and threats?

Constructions of democracy and media in the Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy

The democratic process, as it took place within the operations of the Czech citizen parliament, was constructed through (opportunities for) enhanced and pluralist participation and representation, as deliberative, consensual and outcome-oriented, and as adhering to direct, participatory and substantive modes of democracy. The citizen parliament itself functioned as a space of enhanced participation of the involved actors, which, as already described, facilitated the conditions towards the equalisation of power relations.

When it comes to democracy's core dimensions of participation and representation, representation is considered vital, for the parliamentarians, but is important for them that it is supported by pluralism, tolerance and inclusivity. Participation, according to the parliamentarians is the cornerstone of a healthy democracy, when it involves the broad realm of the political and is not reduced to the field of institutionalised and formal politics.

Finally, media's main constructions as public sphere, as public good, as challenged institution, as industry in crisis and as platforms (of freedom but also difficult to navigate), are illustrative of the grounded belief among citizens regarding the direct connections between healthy media and healthy democracy.

SRQ2a: The performance of participation in the Citizen Parliament

The performance of participation at the citizen parliament was structured via the following components: dialogue and deliberation; in-group management; learning, competences and knowledge; ordinariness and expertise; focus on outcomes; and, decision-making. The previous section, engaging with the theme of power relations, already addressed how the constituents of ordinariness and expertise were constructed. To avoid repetitions, this section will present the core components of dialogue and deliberation, in-group management and learning, while the components of decision-making and outcome orientation will be elaborated in the following section, regarding the construction of democracy.

Dialogue and deliberation

Dialogue and deliberation were performed through the implementation of a series of principles and values that were put to practice, which enabled the maximalisation of participatory intensities among the parliamentarians.

The two basic value-discourses that were activated during the citizen parliament operations were *freedom and respect*. All parliamentarians emphasised the importance of respect for diversity and pluralism, as it concerns both the CP operations and the broader functioning of democracy. Hence, time/space was given to minority positions expressed by the parliamentarians, and opinions and voices were not silenced during the discussions and deliberation for the formulation of subtopics and resolutions. A parliamentarian even argued: *"I enjoy the fact it is not as I'd like it to be"* (E2/CP2).

In addition to the respect for the different ideas and positions, the parliamentarians tried to include all members in the conversations through active engagement, inviting the less active participants to share their ideas. Creating the opportunities for all members to speak was also protected through the main rules the CP members agreed on during the first day, with timekeeping being one of these rules. As one parliamentarian argued: *"no one should have a monologue lasting half an hour"* (AP/CP1).

Also, the parliamentarians, in their reflections on the CP operation, stressed the importance of freedom of expression, for a balanced and inclusive dialogue and deliberation. One participant mentioned: *"I didn't feel that there was any opinion that was wrong. There was always a dialogue, and no one feared to ask someone next to them, if they didn't understand something"* (AP/CP1). None of the participants mentioned any restriction in their freedom to speak, even if they recognized time pressures or in-group dynamics that might have favoured or given more time to the discussion of certain themes and topics over others. Moreover, the parliamentarians did not feel restricted by the overall structure and procedures taking place at the citizen parliament, as it is attested by one member:

> *"In my opinion, there were no obstacles to my thinking, which is actually the most important thing. And at the same time, I understand that we were taught some rules there, how it would work, which I respected, and they didn't actually prevent me from doing the work at all."* (I)

Another element that contributed to the quality of dialogue and deliberation was the opportunity for *argument-based debates*, which, for several parliamentarians, is vital for democracy. The parliamentarians engaged in processes of communicating their ideas using specific arguments, explaining to the other members their rationale and trying to persuade them for the relevance of their suggested subtopics and resolutions. One parliamentarian commented: *"I would not have thought that such a cultivated debate would happen with strangers"* (I).

Moreover, these debates, apart from argument-based were also outcome-oriented; the debates, conversations, deliberation and plenary discussions led to specific outcomes, that is, formulating subtopics and resolutions, and deciding on which ones to vote for, which was attained through processes of enhanced participation and intense collaboration among the parliamentarians.

Finally, the *complementarity (and improvement) of ideas and positions* during the discussions and deliberation leading to the formulation of the subtopics and resolutions, was another component constructing the citizen parliament as a space of agonistic dialogue and deliberation. Participants reflecting about their own and the group's contribution focussed for instance on *"mutual enrichment – the opportunity to see the issue from a different perspective"* (S1).

These qualities of dialogue and deliberation that allowed for balanced and enhanced participation, were enabled by certain *conditions*, such as the overall citizen parliament design and structure (and its dedicated components and time for dialogue and deliberation), and the citizen parliament moderation (facilitating and protecting (the time for) outcome-oriented discussions).

In-group management

Two key elements were identified in how the parliamentarians managed their group, leading to conditions of enhanced and balanced participation: The first is assuming responsibility for the citizen parliament operation, and the second is how the group of parliamentarians provided support for its members.

Assuming responsibility for the parliament operation was first constructed via the parliamentarians' collective agreement on the citizen parliament's modus operandi and ethics, which were agreed upon during the first parliament session. The parliamentarians referred to these rules of conduct and ethics on several occasions during the parliament's operations, as well as in the survey responses and interviews. These rules, which were put on the wall of the room in which each CP session took place, being visible at all times, referred among others to an overall ethical approach, to respectful and factual discussion, and to timekeeping (M1), and functioned as a framework of reference and were fully respected throughout the CP operations.

Assuming responsibility for the CP operation was also expressed through the active roles the parliamentarians took to ensure that the discussions and the deliberation would be held in a constructive fashion leading to concrete outcomes (formulating and voting on subtopics and resolutions). Within this framework, several members volunteered or accepted the nomination by other members to undertake the role of the 'table host' in the world café activities, [7]would act as informal or ad hoc moderators facilitating the group discussions and activities, would regularly remind the other members of the mutually agreed rules, of the CP structure and the responsibility for output (resolutions), or they would act as time-keepers reminding each other of the limited time that was left. The parliamentarians also undertook the responsibility of representing the (diversity of the) Czech citizenry in the CP activities. One of the parliamentarians reflected:

[7] The table host in the world café activities was the member who stayed at the table to create consistency and continuity with the topics that were being discussed, while all other members would rotate, moving on to discuss the topics with other working groups, positioned in other working stations/tables. It was a role incorporated in the CP design, not a role the parliamentarians came up with, still, the parliamentarians would choose among themselves who would take up this role each time.

> *"It is difficult for me to assess my own contribution in a broader perspective, but I tried to be active, to contribute constructively to the discussions and to reflect opinions and experiences that may be close to people from my socio-demographic group. I perceived my role as one of twenty members of a group that is supposed to represent the diversity of society, and I tried to take this responsibility seriously"* (S1).

Assuming responsibility for the shared cause was evident throughout the CP operation. As one participant mentioned reflecting about the group's collaboration: *"It is positive that there was no one in the group who was not serious, sabotaging the discussions or anything else – we all had some higher, selfless interest in mind"* (S1). Or, as argued later by another participant: "It pleases me that there is some common interest. Even though the group is diverse, we wanted to create a good resolution" (AP/CP1). Their sense of responsibility for the citizen parliament was also expressed through the enhanced interest in representing the parliament outside its operations, in special events being organised to communicate about the citizen parliament and the produced resolutions (for instance, in the Senate of the Czech Republic, on 5 June 2025, and in the European Parliament, on 13 January 2026).

When it comes to *in-group support*, it consisted of the practice to provide information or explain to other CP members the guidelines of expected tasks, procedures and outcomes, or certain concepts and terms of thematic relevance to the CP, when there were questions among the group. Also, as mentioned earlier, parliamentarians would regularly try to motivate peers who were less active or silent to express their opinions and share their ideas *("You don't say anything. We'd be happy if you shared your thoughts"*, E1/CP1). Moreover, in the cases where a participant was critiqued or addressed in a negative fashion, some other members of the group would tend to defend them, and overall, as already explained, disagreement and tension were handled via civility and respect.

Learning, competences and knowledge

Another main component through which enhanced participation was performed involves learning. The parliamentarians were engaged in processes of enhanced participation not only when it comes to dialogue, deliberation and formulation of resolutions, but also through processes of learning and knowledge exchange. Knowledge acquisition and sharing did not function as an auxiliary component but as a fundamental and organic element – but also, condition of possibility – of participation.

One area of learning concerned the concepts, issues, perspectives and debates related to the CP theme focussing on media and democracy. The participants found themselves gradually more knowledgeable in this core theme, during the three-month period of the CP operation. In parallel, they participated in the CP activities through a process of 'training' in: a. the formulation of ideas and proposals in comprehensible and impactful ways, in their efforts to make their ideas understandable by the rest of the parliamentarians, and b. argument-based dialogue. Through their engagement in the CP activities, the parliamentarians enhanced also their skills of reflexivity concerning participatory and collaborative processes, learning, outcomes and their own and the group's contribution in these outcomes. One of the concretely mentioned skills was that of listening (and learning through listening): *"At the beginning, I didn't know much, but gradually I think we learned to listen to each other and it was to the benefit of the cause"* (S1). Similarly, another parliamentarian mentioned: *"I learned to listen more and not necessarily assert my opinion"* (S1).

More broadly, the parliamentarians engaged in 'learning by doing', a method through which they improved both the individual and the group skills and competences during the process, and which, according to them was reflected in the quality of the produced output. As one participant reflected about the voted resolutions: *"I am satisfied because many of them did not pass. I think we had more courage and self-confidence not to let some go"* (S4).

Furthermore, for the parliamentarians, the participation in the citizen parliament helped them enhance their media but also civic literacy competences, which relates to what Carpentier (2016, p. 78) and others (Wasko & Mosco, 1992, p. 7) have described as participation *in* and *through* a field, allowing for "transgressive" and "transferred forms of participation" (Carpentier, 2016, p. 78) from one field of activity to others. An important part of this learning experience in and through the participation in the citizen parliament was not giving up and finding ways forward, as the reflections by two parliamentarians highlight:

> *"Although the end of the meeting was quite chaotic, with a lot of time pressure and a certain amount of confusion, I feel that most of the participants saw it more as part of the learning process than as a failure. Despite all the complications, there was a clear effort not to give up, to look for ways forward and to maintain a constructive approach. I found that important and actually encouraging"* (S2).

Similarly: *"I especially appreciate the openness to joint learning and finding a way forward"* (S2).

This is attested also by the reflections shared by some of the parliamentarians who explained that this experience functioned as an eye-opener concerning the importance of dialogue in democracy and engagement in democratic processes, learning, through this participatory experience, how democracy works in practice. As one of the parliamentarians argued:

> *"I actually realized that things that seem completely logical to me and that others should understand right away, aren't, and that I have to learn to formulate those things differently or better, in order to maybe gain support. That means that for me it was like a big lesson about the democratic process"* (I).

Struggles to (maximalist) participation and processes of minimalist/maximalist participation

Even if the parliamentarians engaged in processes of enhanced or even maximalist participation, these were not struggle-free. Some of these struggles were related to *limitations to knowledge*. The first concerned the lack of adequate knowledge by some parliamentarians of the CP theme (media and democracy) and its topics, which, was described by some parliamentarians as abstract or 'theoretical'. The second involved the lack of knowledge or familiarisation with the CP process and format leading to the formulation of the resolutions. Several parliamentarians argued that they lacked prior knowledge, and they would have appreciated more guidance in the formulation of the resolutions, by the moderators or the experts. As one participant reflected:

> *"I would appreciate clearer and more specific instructions, for example: 'the goal of this activity is..., 'the [table host] should do this and that at this stage', 'the result should be a specific type of formulation'. Currently, I sometimes lack the guidance to help steer the discussion to a productive conclusion."* (S2)

Another area of struggle around maximalist participation concerned the *differences in engagement* of the CP participants, with some being at times more dominant and others not

equally active. Moreover, even if no major conflicts occurred during the CP activities, still, tension or *disagreement may have functioned as deterrents to participation* for some of the participants (at least momentarily), as one participant explained: *"I also experienced more challenging moments during the debates – for example, I had the feeling that one of the participants, instead of trying to create a resolution together, repeatedly questioned the opinions of others, which was demotivating for me"* (S2).

Time constraints also limited the duration of dialogue and groupwork, for the sake of efficiency (maintaining the outcome-oriented focus on deliberation). One parliamentarian reflected: "I find it uncomfortable to face impatient insistence that we close the debate with an opinion that I disagree with" (S2). The parliamentarians felt that more available time for the exchange of ideas, for deliberation and for the formulation of the resolutions would have rendered the process less stressful and would have helped in improving the resolutions' quality. As one parliamentarian commented during the second CP session, which was for all members the most stressful one, *"I cannot imagine that we will be able to deal with all ten subtopics, when only three of them are important to me"* (AP/CP2). Similarly: *"The time frame of some activities seemed underestimated from the beginning, which makes it difficult to have a deeper discussion and jointly create outputs."* (S2).

Despite these limitations, the processes in which the parliamentarians were engaged allowed for *enhanced or maximalist participation*, given that the parliamentarians functioned on an equal power base concerning their positions, roles and decision-making power. Still, the participatory intensities varied. For instance, the collaboration in smaller groups – mainly during the discussions around and the formulation of subtopics and resolutions – offered opportunities for closer or more intense interaction, than, for instance the plenary discussions.

What is also important is that fully balanced and maximalist participation is not created automatically, it takes time and trust to develop. The qualifiers of participation in the Czech citizen parliament changed over time, with participants feeling more relaxed and at ease to participate (or not) in ways they felt comfortable with. Given also that participation is voluntary, in the process of time participants chose when and how to participate.

Finally, as it was mentioned earlier, while enhanced and maximalist participation were enabled within the citizen parliament operation and activities, the citizen parliament participants were not involved at all in the citizen parliament design, its set-up, and the selection of its participants.

SRQ2b: Constructions of democracy in the Citizen Parliament

This section will first address the key components through which democracy was constructed during the activities and operations of the citizen parliament, and then present the broader discourses around democracy, which were reflected in the parliamentarians' debates and produced outcomes. In both cases, the analysis addresses the struggles that informed these constructions of democracy.

Performance of democracy in the citizen parliament

The core components through which democracy was constructed during the operations of the citizen parliament were dialogue and deliberation, focus on outcomes, and decision-making

(constructed through delegation and preference for consensus). The component of dialogue and deliberation has been elaborated earlier in the report and will not be repeated here, but only briefly touched upon, when necessary for the comprehensibility of the analysis.

Focus on outcomes

When it comes to the citizen parliament's focus on outcomes, it was constructed through a consistent attentiveness to protecting this key component of the CP, and thus protecting the CP's structure, rationale and aims. Protecting the CP's outcomes was constructed in a threefold manner. First, by *securing output*, that is making sure that each citizen parliament session would result in the formulation and voting of subtopics and related resolutions. Second, by *producing output* in a collective and collaborative fashion, rendering the produced subtopics and resolutions the product of collaboration, complementarity but also compromise. Third, by *respecting this outcome*, confirming the legitimacy of the citizen parliament as an outcome-producing and decision-making body. The focus on, and respect of outcomes, is illustrated in one of the parliamentarian's reflections concerning the resolutions of the last session, addressing media and participation: *"I am glad that we came up with something, because it was a difficult topic and it intersected a lot with the previous one [media representation]. Otherwise, I liked some of the resolutions more, I did not want others to pass, but that is democracy"* (S4).

Decision-making

i. Striving for consensus

The key component of consensual democracy relates to the preference and efforts by the parliamentarians for consensus. This was manifested again in a threefold fashion. First, by collectively setting up and respecting the agreed rules of decision making. Second, by the choice made by the parliamentarians to decide on the selected resolutions through a vote of enhanced majority, of 2/3 of the votes, opting for high levels of agreement and ideally for full consensus. The third component was opting for openness and publicness through the choice of the public vote, and the decision of secret vote when asked by one of the parliamentarians, which was never activated.

ii. Delegation

Delegation concerned assigning responsibility or handing over the power of decision-making or action either within the group of parliamentarians or to third actors. When it comes to *ingroup delegation*, it was mainly expressed through the appointment of table hosts, assigning the responsibility (and authority) to them to set the direction of the conversation, to lead the formulation of subtopics or resolutions, and to deliver output. When it comes to outgroup delegation, it concerned firstly the recognition and assignment of authority to the CP moderators, to manage the group of parliamentarians, to offer guidance and solutions to arisen problems, and to intervene in conflicts should they arise. As was captured through the ethnographic observations during the first parliament session:

> *"In the discussion of the rules, there was also a demand for the possibility of self-regulation within a given group, but in potentially more conflictual or escalated cases, the participants expressed that they would be happy for the moderators to intervene – thereby delegating power to them. They likened them to an insurance policy or someone managing a debate in the House of Commons"* (E1/CP1).

Outgroup delegation concerned also the appointment of responsibility to the CP organisers to make adjustments to the CP structure, script and process. This concerned, for instance, the number of subtopics (and produced resolutions) that could be handled per CP session, an adjustment that was implemented after the parliamentarians' feedback on the second CP session. As some parliamentarians reflected: *"I really like the organizers' reactions to the 'feedback' of the participants. It's like they read/listen/perceive what's going on around them and react to it. Then the participants try harder and it starts to make sense"* (S3). Similarly:

> *"I appreciate the effort to reflect our feedback and, despite the given limits, which cannot be fully changed during the meeting, to strive for the smoothest and most accommodating process. I had the feeling that the organizers, despite some criticism from the participants, were able to strengthen their self-confidence and act with civil, natural authority"* (S3).

Struggles in decision-making and producing outcomes

These decisions and practices were not always straightforward or void of struggle. As the parliamentarians themselves mentioned on several occasions, part of the struggle in producing outcomes was a series of *limitations*, concerning the levels of *knowledge* regarding the overarching theme of the parliament on media and democracy and its three main topics (media systems, media representation and media participation). For some parliamentarians, it would have been preferable to translate the key themes *"into a language and perspective that is not academic"* (I). *"I don't mean that they should be thematically different. They should simply be wrapped up in such a way that people understand what it's about from the beginning"* (I). Moreover, the parliamentarians addressed their lack of knowledge and competences required for the creation of the resolutions. As one participant explained: *"since we didn't have experience with it, we got into things that were of a technical nature, by which I mean like some procedural things that we don't actually have the competence, expertise, insight to make decisions about them ad hoc"* (I). Part of the limitations in formulating the subtopics and resolutions concerned the levels of knowledge and skills in legal and regulatory language. Moreover, as the parliamentarians emphasised on numerous occasions, time constraints impacted significantly on the extent of dialogue and deliberation and on the quality of the formulated resolutions.

Still, what is noteworthy is that the parliamentarians' awareness of this environment of restrictions did not curb their sense of responsibility towards the common cause, as is reflected in a parliamentarian's evaluation of the third parliament session's resolutions:

> *"In the given possibilities and limits of very limited time and space and without deeper expertise, I am completely satisfied, even surprised, how under such conditions complex things were managed to be formulated well and relatively stylistically uniformly (unlike the last CP)"* (S3).

Another aspect of struggle concerned the *different approaches by the parliamentarians to demands' formulation*. These dealt with whether the resolutions shall be specific or general in their formulation, whether they should be 'mild' or more opinionated, whether they should express idealism or feasibility, reflecting also different approaches to the possibility of change or impact.

Moreover, the element of *anonymity VS identified authorship* of the parliament's output was raised. The parliamentarians agreed to have their names included in the citizen parliament's resolutions report. Still, according to one parliamentarian (I), this kind of visibility and publicness,

through name disclosure, which is connected to more direct responsibility for the outcome, might have led to the formulation of less opinionated resolutions, avoiding communicating very clear or strong demands for change.

The struggle around decision-making was related also to whether the process of *decision making* should be *open and public or secret*, whether the parliament should decide only through Yes/No votes or whether Abstention should be part of the decision-making adopted model (the latter was implemented). Finally, some parliamentarians hinted that there was a *'pressure' for consensus*, stemming from the adopted decision-making model, leading some parliamentarians to be silent in cases where they might not have been in full agreement. As one parliamentarian argued: "When I felt that everybody agreed, it was harder to speak up, at least during the first CP days (I).

Furthermore, as the parliament's work was a product of collaboration and compromise under knowledge and time constraints, the parliamentarians communicated at times *frustration about the imperfect output* (of democratic process), as the following reflection about a participant's own contribution summarises well:

> *"I feel a bit ambivalent [about my own contribution], or rather I don't feel very beneficial. On the one hand, I try to be active, on the other hand, I sometimes have a hard time reconciling my need for a broad and deeper discussion with the pace and dynamics of the group. I often feel that I would like to say more than I can effectively convey, and that we have a hard time 'meeting' others in the debate. It is not easy for me to balance the collective result with my desire for a more professionally formulated resolution. Nevertheless, I appreciate the opportunity to be part of the process and am learning to better perceive how to contribute in a way that resonates with the group".* (S2)

Another parliamentarian also commented on the produced resolutions of the second session of the parliament (focussing on media systems):

> *"I'm basically satisfied, although with several resolutions I had more trouble with their wording than with what's behind them, and that's why I couldn't vote for them. If we could express ourselves more precisely, it could help us, I think, so that there wouldn't be any 'noise'. But I think we did a good job."* (S2)

Discursive constructions of democracy

In the broader construction of democracy, at the societal level, a first core element identified by the parliamentarians, is *opting for enhanced forms of participation* by citizens, not in the strict and restrictive sense of formal politics, but in the broader sense of the political (see Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, pp. 13-14; Mouffe, 2000; 2005). As one parliamentarian argued, explaining how citizen involvement becomes relevant beyond the immediate field or area of activity: *"Anything that sensitises civil society makes sense to me. Even if nothing comes out of [the citizen parliament] here, the cognitive or research aspect that will arise for you, makes sense to me"* (AP/CP2). Citizen and civil society engagement can take the form of citizen participation in supervisory and decision-making bodies and institutions at the local, regional and national levels of governance. Also, it can take the form of active engagement in community and local issues or issues and causes of broader shared concern, involving the citizens in finding solutions and implementing social change. As one parliamentarian explained, reflecting about their motivations to join the citizen parliament: *"I like the idea that we can change something or try and*

contribute to our future" (AP/CP2). The parliamentarians also argued for the importance of enhanced opportunities for social and professional groups' participation in processes and decisions that concern them (e.g. in unions). A third component concerns citizens' access to local, regional and public media, performing public participation in and through the media.

The parliamentarians addressed also the *importance of core values and their performance* in public discourse, in politics and more broadly in society, such as freedom (of expression); diversity, pluralism, respect for difference, tolerance and inclusivity; equality and justice in rights and in law, but also in opportunities. As one parliamentarian reflected, emphasising the element of respect of these core values, democracy "*is an organisation of society in which every individual is guaranteed certain rights and respect, because it takes place within the framework of some values like human rights, dignity, fundamental [values], which are respected by the system itself... respected, respected, that's right"* (I). While democracy was approached as a space for free debate and free expression of opinion (I), still, some participants shared a relativist, and not absolutist approach to freedom, arguing that the concept of freedom tends to be abused today and through its abuse it becomes harmful: *"the concept of freedom seems to me to be terribly abused now. Like freedom is that you can do anything. You can't. Because you're harming someone"* (I).

The performance of these values relates to increased opportunities for both *representation and participation* of a. *the diversity of people/social groups/regions* in supervisory and decision making bodies, institutions, governance, civil society and media, and b. *the representation and inclusion of the diversity of issues*, topics, approaches of these groups in public debate, made visible in media, in government, in the national parliament and political parties, in civil society and in education. This was reflected, for instance in the formulated subtopics and resolutions addressing the need for enhanced opportunities for representation and participation in (and through) the media (see MRR1-7, MPR1-6).

Democracy, for the parliamentarians, is also constructed by adherence to the *rule of law*, and by accountability, transparency and ethical leadership and governance, led by the principle and practice of serving the public interest, and not private interests. State intervention by regulation and supervision is important for the protection of rights and freedoms, but also for the control and hindrance of resource and power imbalances (protecting the fair distribution of resources and equal opportunities for people). Such claims were addressed, for instance, in the abovementioned subtopics and resolutions regarding people's equal opportunities to media representation and participation, but also in those that centred around the efforts to restrain media ownership concentrated in the hands of oligarchs or billionaires (MSR1-2). For one of the parliamentarians, media *"shouldn't be owned by multimillionaires or people who represent just one percent of the population"* (AP/CP1).

Further guarantees of democracy are considered the *separation of powers* and the role of the state in safeguarding the independence of the fundamental democratic institutions (media, legislative bodies, parliament). The abovementioned resolutions aiming to prevent media monopolies and oligopolies address also this core component of democracy, as they try to avert 'media capture', often manifested through the entanglement of state-economic-media interests, which fundamentally disrupts the separation and independence of powers in democratic states (see Doudaki et al., 2025, p. 17).

Moreover, important is considered the maintenance of *internal and external pluralism*, not only in the communication of content and ideas, but also in the compound of the representative bodies and institutions. The latter is related to both plurality of decision-making bodies and authorities functioning in a complementary fashion (avoiding the situation of single or absolute authorities), and to pluralism and diversity in these bodies' and institutions' composition.

While state regulation and supervision were considered important, the parliamentarians argued for the need to maintain certain levels of *autonomy in key fields*, spheres or institutions (e.g., media, education, or civil society) for a healthy democracy, and for that, *state-civil society (and media) alliances* are needed. Autonomy is related to a certain degree of self-regulation by the fields themselves, and their related institutions and actors. As one parliamentarian argued during a conversation addressing the need to improve the representations of the Czech society's diversity: *"You can't enforce any representation by directive, you can't just tell journalists 'you're doing it wrong now'. I think the state should do it, it should be created by people's activity"* (E1/CP3). The claims for autonomy and self-regulation were connected with a certain degree of *distrust towards the state*, as the single actor and authority of decision-making and implementation of the law, echoing the experiences from the country's Communist past. The concerns the parliamentarians shared involved the threat of over-regulation or excessive state control, expressed for instance through overly control by the Ministry of Education to schools or through media censorship.

Moreover, for the parliamentarians, regulation alone will not guarantee the safeguarding of democratic practice and the quality of democracy. What is also needed, is a developed *democratic culture* embodied by citizens. For this purpose, the component of education for active citizenship is considered important, activated through media education for greater public involvement. For the parliamentarians, civic education is connected to civic participation. On several occasions, the *citizen parliament is mentioned as a model of deliberative and direct democracy*, that can be applied in other fields and issues, offering a long-term or permanent space of democratic debate for the citizens, in the form of an open forum for (solution or output-oriented) citizen deliberation (see MRR6). As one parliamentarian argued, agreeing with the adoption of the relevant resolution: *"I would like to apply the concept of a citizens' assembly to other topics"* (MRR6-Op), not only related to media (and monitoring media content), but also a variety of important societal issues. For the parliamentarians, a citizens' assembly democratizes participation as it *"actually gives society more space to speak and doesn't give space only to the most educated or the elite"* (I).

Societal struggles and threats to democracy

Among the struggles and threats to democracy, apart from the already mentioned danger for *overregulation and excessive state control*, parliamentarians addressed also the democratic backsliding in Central Eastern Europe, the increasing pressures for the (re)centralisation of power, state or leaders' corruption, and the lack of ethical practice in politics. Also, the *lack of adequate pluralism* in government, governance, in media content and broadly in the public sphere was addressed as a disruptive element to a well-functioning democracy.

Furthermore, parliamentarians mentioned *citizens' lack of interest for politics*, which is partly connected to people's disappointment with the political system and with how actually politics takes place. This last element of struggle is connected to the already mentioned *frustration*

regarding the (always) imperfect outcomes of democratic processes, which cannot fully satisfy every single member of the polity, being the products of negotiation, collaboration and compromise. Part of these struggles and frustrations concerned the realisation by the parliamentarians of the *impossibility of full or truly fair representation* of all people and of ideas. For instance, one parliamentarian felt that there was not adequate 'mental' space to address in the citizen parliament an issue that is important to them but still not popular in the Czech public sphere. The parliamentarian did not believe that the other CP members would have blocked the conversation, but they felt that the rest of the parliamentarians would likely not find it interesting, important or relevant: "There was room to defend it. But as I said, … it's just not an important topic for them. They don't feel that it's an important topic, and that's the whole problem with it" (I). Furthermore, a parliamentarian who commented on the voted resolution of the citizens' open forum mentioned above stated: *"I agree [with the resolution], although I am concerned that we will not […] have all the social groups represented. So, it will be difficult to build and maintain such a forum". Similarly, another parliamentarian commented: "I disagreed, but only because I cannot imagine a truly fair application in practice."* (MRR6- Op).

Moreover, among the disruptive elements to democracy, the parliamentarians mentioned the *lack of equal opportunities* for all citizens to enjoy the rights and benefits of society. As one parliamentarian argued, *"for me, democracy should ensure the same rights for all people in society, and the fact that someone doesn't have the right to housing because it's not even available here, is quite a [big problem]"* (I).

A potential risk that was identified was related to the *deterioration of the quality of public debate*, especially online. While the opportunities offered through online and social media for expression of opinion and participation were appreciated, unmoderated, unfiltered content on social media was seen as *"as a source of negative feedback and unconstructive debate"* (E1/CP1). Moreover, parliamentarians addressed the increased toxicity and polarisation in the (online) public sphere, which dissuades people from participating in public debate. Social media as a single mode of engagement was seen as an insufficient tool for participation, and parliamentarians agreed that they cannot function as substitutes of deliberation and politics. As one parliamentarian commented, *"I'm glad FB is not a general referendum"* (E1/CP1).

SRQ2c: Constructions of media in the Citizen Parliament

The Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy, through its activities and outputs, as already mentioned, discursively constructed media as a challenged institution, as industry in crisis, as public sphere, as public good, and as platforms/technologies (of freedom but also difficult to navigate). These articulations reflect the societal value the Czech citizens attribute to media and their belief in media's special function in serving democracy.

Media as a challenged institution

For the Czech citizen parliament, 'media in crisis' was one of the most discussed topics. Participants were aware of many contemporary challenges media face as institutions. A key challenge concerns the decline in public's trust, without which media cannot perform their important societal and democratic roles (as analysed in the previous section).

This decline in trust was regularly addressed during the CP sessions and was connected to different causes – for example that media overlook important topics and regional news *("It is*

necessary to support news from the regions so that society can balance the differences in living standards between the centre and the outskirts of the country – locally and socially", MRR4-Op), or that media do not represent, or address, the different societal groups *("80 per cent of offered media [content] is for 20 percent of the people"*, E2/CP3). One other reason for the decline in trust is that public service media are seen as being under constant political pressure or influence. Moreover, traditional news media seem unaccountable or not open to criticism, which seems to be at odds with the actual conditions in the contemporary media landscape. As one participant said: *"Media should step down from the pedestal"* (E2/CP1).

The parliamentarians showed awareness regarding media's importance and how media struggle to fulfil their societal roles and shared the view that media are a key institution which the state should support more through regulation and more active subsistence. Participants were aware that (financial) interventions can lead to state-controlled media, so they imagined the support more indirectly – for example by supporting professional organisations or intermediaries: *"You can't tell a private entity or put pressure on a non-profit organisation on what to do—but perhaps it could function as a chamber, not entirely market-driven"* (E1/CP2).

The media were also constructed as a channel through which ideology is spread. For this reason, according to some parliamentarians, media should prioritise "experts" over "activists": *"Fewer personal comments, more verified information. Diversity of views and opinions, not cultivating a monopoly on the one truth. Preferring expert discussions to activist presentations"* (AP/CP1). Still, not everybody fully embraced the idea of the 'neutrality' of experts, and some participants argued for a more organic collaboration between professional media and civil society. A similar debate, reflecting also different positions as to who should have access to media-as-institutions, is illustrated in the conversation below between four participants, which concerns the participation in public service media councils:

> *- "I think only people from the field should be there."*
> *- "People can have opinions on broadcasting even without working in the field."*
> *- "The public service media are supposed to serve everyone."*
> *- "Yeah, but I think it would be better to include only those with education within the field."*
> (E2/CP2)

Media as industry in crisis

According to the citizen parliament participants, the institutional support of media is needed also because of loss of revenues from advertisement which has nowadays migrated to the very large online platforms (VLOPs). Media, simply put, cannot make profit today because of the new and strong competitors: *"It is hard for the media because they need to be professional so they cannot keep up with the pace of social media"* (E2/ CP1). This led to a decline in traditional publishers, with (news) media being nowadays owned mostly by companies and people active in other sectors. This, for the parliamentarians, has led to a problematic situation as it regards media ownership – in terms of media concentration and potential instrumentalisation, a concern which was reflected in the formulation of several resolutions addressing media concentration and diversity in the media market. One participant commented on one of the resolutions that addresses media ownership, as follows: *"we have been trying all along to find a way to ensure that the media are not owned by private owners who promote their interests [in the media they own]. At the same time, these owners are often super-rich and businessmen who can influence the world"* (MSR1-Op). Another participant also commented on the same resolution

arguing that *"[t]he objective was to tighten the concentration of media ownership by private entities, or rather by a single private entity"* (MSR1-Op).

The discursive construction of media as industry in crisis was also present in debates about journalists' labour and their working conditions. *"Decent working conditions in the media"* (M1) became one of the subtopics, that is, one of the thematic areas under which the parliamentarians formulated specific resolutions. For the parliamentarians, the absence of decent working conditions in the media is a risk, especially in regional media, which may be more susceptible to financial and other pressures. As the CP participants argued, *"the good people leave [regional media] because they need more money"* (E2/CP2) or *"to be a journalist used to be prestigious, now they cannot make a living"* (E2/CP2).

Media as public sphere

Besides the crisis discourses, media were also constructed with reference to their functions and values. In this regard, the media were constructed as a public sphere, as a space where opinions and information circulate and so they facilitate a debate on public affairs.

This function relates to both private and public service media but in different ways, something which, is reflected in the parliamentarians' expectations regarding the obligation of private and public media to host a diversity of voices for the different societal debates. One parliamentarian explained this through an example based on personal experience: *"I tried to write an article in response to a tendentious article on Aktuálně.cz. But what can I accuse it of as a private media outlet? That would only be relevant for a public media outlet"* (E1/CP2). Another parliamentarian also commented: *"If we want to tell them how to do it, it has to be public service media"* (E2/CP3). The view that PSM have a special role and remit – in media and journalism, but also in society – instructed a lot of the parliamentarians' ideas and suggested resolutions. This was expressed for example in the suggestion for the cooperation between regional or community media and PSM. PSM as highly professional could share their knowhow or *"could give them [regional or community media] space"* (E2/CP4). This is connected, for the participants, to the remit of PSM: *"Social diversity should be represented in the public service media"* (MRR2-Op).

Media were also viewed as a tool to enable citizen involvement in public affairs, as information on various topics activates citizens, who are then more willing to participate in the public debate.

Media as public good

Through their different functions media serve public good in different ways. First, media were seen by the parliamentarians as providers of education and culture: *"Institutionalized media should get close to the audience by organising educational, enlightening events, making their work clearer for the purpose of popularisation"* (AP/CP1). This includes also media's, and mainly PSM's capacity to instruct the citizens in the case of public crises, as one older participant suggested: *"In our younger years, there was Civil Defence. The youth and part of the middle age generation do not know what to do in such situations"* (AP/CP1).

An educational capacity identified in media does not involve news content only, but popular culture as well. As one participant commented: *"Recently, I was surprised by the fact that TV shows such as Ulice or Ordinace [long-running soap operas on one commercial TV station] can have*

an educational role too – there are minority topics in these shows, which somewhat educate the society", AP/CP1).

The educational and cultural capacity of media is connected also to media's participatory role, and to the capacity, of for instance, local and community media to involve local publics and communities and to train or sensitise them to a culture of civic participation.

Media were also seen as a window to the world, or as providers of a diverse view of the world. For the parliamentarians, this may be served, as already mentioned, through the diversity of media content creators. *"A varied group makes varied content"* (E2/CP3) as one participant put it. Moreover, media, and especially public service media, were seen as drivers for societal change, encouraging the civic *"imagination about how to change the world"*, contributing to the vision *"that change is possible"* (E1/CP1).

Media-as-public-good bear also an aesthetic dimension, enriching people's daily lives, as one participant mentioned: *"I don't see media only as political tools, but also as an aesthetic [medium], which brings beauty to my household"* (I).

Media as platforms/technologies

Media as technologies or as platforms did not receive much attention in the parliamentarians' constructions of the media. In one of the few occasions, one parliamentarian addressed social media as a democratic tool:

> *"Thankfully, the media are not only public but also social, because otherwise we would actually continue to be manipulated, and it would not be democracy. So social networks give me the opportunity to believe that democracy exists, because they are a democratic tool"* (I).

Digital and online media were also addressed through the discussion and related resolution concerning the need for the *"[c]reation of a legal and ethical framework for digital creators and a system of control and enforcement"* (MSR14).

Media were also constructed as platforms difficult to understand and use in a beneficial manner for individuals and society, especially in the contemporary digital-online environments. As one participant said: *"It was confirmed to me how difficult can be to orientate in any topic for the regular public"* (AP/CP1). Media literacy was then addressed as a way to counter this difficulty, cultivating people's critical skills in media 'consumption' and media/content production. As one participant commented, in relation to the content on social media and the influx of online disinformation: *"You may be saying something within the law, but it's just lies. This is where I see the only hope in media education, because I can't give these kids any other option"* (E1/CP2).

3.6 Short concluding reflection

In the Czech Republic, there is no long tradition in the organisation of citizen parliaments or assemblies. The organisation of the Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy, in particular, was the first in the country that addressed the connections between media and democracy, providing an opportunity to Czech citizens to be part of such a democratic endeavour. Through their participation in the parliament, the citizens shared their views, deliberated with other citizens and worked together to develop proposed solutions on how the Czech media can (be supported to) strengthen democracy in the country.

The participants of the Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy, while being a diverse group, having different motivations, were engaged in the operation and activities of the parliament with a high sense of responsibility as it regards the common cause and aims of the parliament. Given the diversity of these individuals' profiles, in terms of age, gender, educational background, professional activity, place of residence and ideological positions, their commitment to the parliament is an indicator of the potential such opportunities may have, for civic engagement and for direct and enhanced forms of democratic practice.

The Czech citizen parliament highlighted the importance but also complexity of participatory processes in civic life. Discussing, collaborating, deliberating and deciding in always imperfect conditions, of:

- time and resource constraints, and of information, skills and knowledge limitations,
- differences in motivations, expectations, preferences, prioritisations, ideological positions,
- compromise as it concerns the extent of dedicated time, quality of produced output, inclusion and synthesis of diverse perspectives,

sometimes led to considerable levels of tension and frustration, which could have further led to dropouts or even termination of this collaborative process. Still, despite the instances of high pressure, frustration and exhaustion experienced by the parliamentarians, all members remained engaged (with varying degrees of engagement) throughout the entire duration of the three-month period of the parliament operations. This level of dedication and perseverance is touching, but also hopeful for what can be achieved through such participatory processes.

Based on the parliamentarians' reflections, their participation in the citizen parliament offered them a valuable learning experience, as they enhanced their media literacy skills and gained a better knowledge of how media function and how media and democracy inform and support one another. They learnt also that media are not unreachable for the regular citizens. Moreover, they were surprised to experience the force of argument-based dialogue, founded on respect for diversity and difference. Equally important, the parliamentarians were engaged in processes of learning about the democratic process, its opportunities and strengths, but also its limitations. Hence, empowerment came through the enhancement of the related skills and competences, which can be transferred to other spheres and fields of activity, outside the citizen parliament itself. Empowerment was related also to the validation of the capacity of 'ordinary' citizens to collaborate, deliberate and meaningfully contribute to public discourse about issues of shared concern.

At the same time, the members of the Czech citizen parliament experienced firsthand that participation does not happen automatically. It requires organisation, structure, time, trust (and time to build trust), energy investment, voluntary and genuine engagement (as people cannot be forced to participate). Moreover, it requires people who are willing to engage in constructive dialogue, on the basis of certain commonly shared and accepted rules and values. Constructive dialogue, as experienced by the parliamentarians, is founded on creating spaces and offering time for the different opinions to be shared, entailing, not only the element of argument-based conversation but also the element of compromise.

Moreover, as any model and process of collaboration and participation, the citizen parliament came with its restrictions and limitations. These had to do with resource limitations, which then

impacted on time allocated, and the number of parliamentarians engaged in the participatory process. The broadness of the theme (media and democracy) and the relatively low number of parliament sessions were to a certain extend at odds with the desire of the parliamentarians for learning and for excellent outputs.

Also, the relatively low number of parliamentarians is connected to questions regarding the possibility or impossibility of representing or addressing all important facets of diversity of the Czech society. Still, given the intensive rhythm of activities in the parliament, this group of 20 parliamentarians, which was selected on the basis of a set of diversity criteria, as explained earlier in the report, managed to remain fully engaged throughout the process, maintaining a collaborative and collegial spirit with a high sense of respect and responsibility for each other, for the process and for the common cause.

This sense of commitment and responsibility was also expressed through the parliamentarians' reflective approach towards their own work, being often critical towards the produced resolutions. Part of the scepticism regarding the produced and accepted resolutions, relates to questions regarding impact, and how such citizen efforts can feed into the public discourse, and inform policy and societal change. While in most such cases it is not easy to trace direct links between citizen initiatives and their translation into, e.g., national or European legislation or policy, still, impact can be evaluated in diverse ways. One of them, as already mentioned, relates to the competences, skills and knowledge of civic and democratic literacy, cultivated and enhanced through such participatory experiences. The citizen parliament involvement offered a training into how citizens can design and organise such initiatives themselves, being engaged in deliberative processes about issues of shared concern. The experience of the participants of the Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy may serve as an inspiration for them, to organise their own participatory and deliberative processes, and as a validation that citizen participation is possible, it matters and is valuable for healthy democracies.

4 Austria

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4.1 Organisational report

Timeframe

The Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy in Austria took place on four Saturdays between March and May 2025, each day from 10:00 to 18:00. Following the common design established in MeDeMAP Deliverable 6.2 (Monnot et al., 2025b), the Citizens' Parliament began with an introductory session on the general theme of Media & Democracy (CP 1), followed by three sessions on the three specified topics that resolutions were developed on. In the Austrian CP, after "media systems and media regulation" (CP 2), the topic of "participation in and through the media" (CP 3) was delt with before "representation in the media" (CP 4).

Participants

The Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy in Austria comprised 20 citizens aged between 19 and 80 years. The group was selected in a two-stage application process from 140 applications based on diversity criteria ascertained through a recruitment questionnaire, with the aim to reflect social diversity as broadly as possible in terms of, among others, age, gender, origin, level of education, media use and socio-political attitudes. The applications followed a public call advertised in a wide range of media and community networks in Austria.

- Age: 19 to 80
- Gender: 9 female, 11 male
- Place of residence: 6 (of 9) Austrian federal states represented (Vienna, Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Styria, and Burgenland)
- Educational level: from secondary school to PhD
- Nationality: 4 people with non-Austrian citizenship (including 3 with German citizenship)

Location

The Vienna Adult Education Centre (Die Wiener Volkshochschulen, VHS) hosted the CP sessions in two of its Vienna locations in the districts of Floridsdorf and Ottakring. The Vienna Adult Education Centre, which promotes adult education for all, supported the Austrian CP from the beginning, taking part in the advisory board. As part of its support, it made its premises, which are suitable for assemblies and group meetings and easily accessible, available free of charge. The locations met the criteria and constraints outlined in Deliverable 6.2 (Monnot et al., 2025b) with regard to costs, accessibility, comfort (including sufficient space for deliberations, break-out sessions and catering facilities), as well as symbolism.

Moderators / Facilitators

The four CP sessions were hosted by two external facilitators – a main facilitator and a co-facilitator – together with two members of the organising team. A third member of the

organising team, who was also one of the two ethnographic observers present, was responsible for participant registration and communication.

We looked for and recruited two experienced facilitators who work with the Art of Hosting (AoH) method, as this best suits the participatory action research (PAR) dimension of the Citizens' Parliaments within the MeDeMAP project. The AoH approach ensures that all participants can express their views and contribute equally to collective deliberations and decision-making in a safe and respectful space and that this co-creation process produces a result in terms of resolutions. The facilitators had prior experience in facilitating deliberative participatory processes. They guided the sessions, facilitated the plenary discussions, and supported group discussions when needed.

- Facilitator: Ruth Picker
- Co-facilitator: Markus Götsch (CP 1, CP 2 and CP 4) / Rupert Roniger (CP 3)
- Organising team: Helmut Peissl, Laurence Monnot
- Participant communication and registration: Andrea Sedlaczek

Experts / Training

For the learning phase, seven experts from research and the media were identified with the support of the advisory board. The experts presented an input before a Q&A session. One scheduled media expert in CP 2 had to cancel at short notice due to illness. In this session, the research expert included more case studies in his presentation and took the opportunity to answer more questions. Three additional experts from the media field were invited as guests to engage in discussion with the CP members during the lunch breaks in CP 3 and CP 4.

The experts were briefed on the expected learning outcomes of their respective sessions, the audience and the input format (15–20 minutes followed by a question-and-answer session). During each session, they were asked to provide an overview of the topic and/or present relevant cases. The instructions specified that the presentation should be didactic and easily understandable for a broad audience, and that they should engage in a dialogue with the citizens. We shared the link to the training videos that had been produced by the MeDeMAP partners for the Citizens' Parliaments with the experts for thematic orientation. In most sessions, the experts were already present to watch the training videos together with the participants before their inputs.

Script

The script we implemented largely corresponds to the script developed for the CP design in Deliverable 6.2 (Monnot et al., 2025b). As was stated there, WP6 partners were free to adjust the script to suit their national context. In addition, the final script was amended slightly from one session to another to adapt to the needs and practices of the citizens, e.g. in terms of the time allocated to the learning and deliberation phases. The four-day format, with each day dedicated to a different topic, ensured that the overall theme of Media & Democracy and the three special topics of Media systems & media regulation, Participation in and through the media and Representation in the media were covered by the CP and that the successive stages (learning – reflection – deliberation – decision-making) enabled a circular and iterative process, following the PAR cycle, while still allowing for an outcome: the adoption of resolutions.

Each session comprised a learning phase with experts, a reflection on the learning in small groups with a definition of sub-topics to be addressed, as well as a check-in and check-out. In the first and last session, there were also dedicated slots for agreeing on the CP procedures and for the closure of the whole process. In Austria, sub-topics were developed in a World Café format in CP 1 and re-defined in the reflection phase of CP 2, CP 3 and CP 4 in small groups, after which they were presented in the plenary and individually prioritised by all participants. The sub-topics were then clustered by the organising team and assigned to four committees for the drafting of resolutions. These committees of five citizens each had been assembled by the organisers prior to each session according to diversity criteria. After the committee work, the drafted resolutions were presented in the plenary and put to individual vote using a dot system (green dot: affirmation; no dot: acceptance; red dot: veto). Vetoes had to be accompanied by a written justification. Resolutions with vetoes were discussed (for as long as the time permitted it) and if possible, changes implemented to integrate the vetoes. Resolutions were adopted by consent, defined by the participants as not receiving more than three vetoes.

After each session, the organising team suggested editorial revisions of the adopted resolutions, which were approved or revised by a self-elected representative of each committee. After the last session, all resolutions were consolidated by the organising team with the purpose of presenting them to the relevant stakeholders in the national resolutions report (see Appendix A.2). As there had been some thematic overlap between the sessions, all resolutions were re-arranged and grouped into five subject areas. In three cases, two thematically linked resolutions were merged. These final revisions were discussed with and approved by the elected representatives of the CP for the national presentation.

Between sessions, participants had access to the training videos, further reading on the topics and the minutes of the previous session on a dedicated online platform provided by WP6 partner CU. Via this platform, participants could also access two surveys, which invited them to comment on the adopted and revised resolutions and to provide feedback on the session. Table 4.1 gives an overview of the four sessions of the Austrian CP in terms of topic, time, location, invited experts and the rough walkthrough.

	CP 1	CP 2	CP 3	CP 4
Topic	Introduction: Media & Democracy	Media systems & media regulation	Participation in and through the media	Representation in the media (closure)
Time	Sat, 22.3.2025, 10:00-18:00	Sat, 5.4.2025, 10:00-18:00	Sat, 26.4.2025, 10:00-18:00	Sat, 17.5.2025, 10:00-18:00
Location	VHS Floridsdorf	VHS Floridsdorf	VHS Ottakring	VHS Floridsdorf
Experts	Josef Trappel (Communication Policy and Media Economics, University of Salzburg)	Nikolaus Forgó (Information Technology and Intellectual Property Law, University of Vienna)	Sieglinde Rosenberger (Political Science, University of Vienna) & Sarah Emler (Journalist, ORF Foreign Affairs Department)	Petra Herczeg (Communication Studies, University of Vienna) & Otto Tremetzberger (Festival of Regions)
Walk-through	check-in – overview of CP process – agreement on discussion rules – learning phase – reflection & deliberation phase in World Café format: development of sub-topics – check-out	check-in – agreement on decision-making procedure – learning phase – reflection phase: re-defining of sub-topics – deliberation phase in committees: drafting of resolutions – decision-making in plenary: adoption of resolutions – check-out	check-in – learning phase – reflection phase: re-defining of sub-topics – deliberation phase in committees: drafting of resolutions – decision-making in plenary: adoption of resolutions – check-out	check-in – learning phase – reflection phase: re-defining of sub-topics – deliberation phase in committees: drafting of resolutions – decision-making in plenary: adoption of resolutions – selection of representatives for national presentation – wrap-up, check-out

Table 4.1: Overview of the Austrian Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy

4.2 Analytical report

Data collection

During the process of the Citizens' Parliament in Austria, a variety of written and audio data were collected, some produced by the participants themselves, in accordance with the PAR approach, others compiled by the organising and research team, including the two ethnographic observers present during all CP sessions, who took field notes on research questions 1 and 2 respectively. Table 4.2 gives an overview of all data that was collected and analysed, along with the referencing system used. Transcriptions of audio data (audio recordings of plenary sessions and interviews) for analysis were produced with the help of the free transcription tool aTrain (developed by the Business Analytics and Data Science-Center of the University of Graz) and manually checked. In the data, all participant names have been anonymized, using the abbreviations F01 to F09 and M01 to M11 for female and male participants respectively. All data was coded using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. Translations of illustrative quotes from the data in this report were done with the help of DeepL.

Data	Source	Referencing system
Final, editorially revised resolutions adopted on the three topics with affirmative votes (green dots) and vetoes (red dots & justifications)	Produced and voted on by the participants during CP 2, CP 3 and CP 4 in 4 committees, with editorial revisions by the organising team after the CP sessions approved by elected CP representatives	- Short reference: Res01 – Res50 - Long reference with source (CP and committee): e.g. Res01, CP3/1; Res16, CP2/2 - Reference to original resolutions that were merged in the final editorial process: e.g. Res14a, Res14b - Reference to vetoes: e.g. Vet_Res19
Comments to resolutions (expressions of confirmatory/dissenting opinions)	Answers by participants to the online resolutions surveys after CP 2, CP 3 and CP 4	e.g. Comm_Res01; Comm_Res02
Minutes of the CP sessions	Compiled by the organising team after each CP session, incorporating flipcharts and posters produced by the participants and facilitators during the CP sessions	Min_CP1; Min_CP2; Min_CP3; Min_CP4
Transcripts of audio recordings of plenary sessions	Selected transcripts of audio recordings produced of plenary activities during the CP sessions	e.g. Aud_CP2/1; Aud_CP2/4; Aud_CP3/7; Aud_CP4/6
Ethnographic observer reports	Produced by 2 ethnographic observers from field notes taken during each CP session, focusing on research questions 1 and 2 and their three secondary research questions respectively	Obs1_CP1; Obs2_CP1; Obs1_CP2; Obs2_CP2; Obs1, CP3; Obs2, CP3; Obs1_CP4; Obs2_CP4
Feedback surveys	Anonymous answers by participants to the online feedback surveys after each CP session	Sur_CP1; Sur_CP2; Sur_CP3; Sur_CP4
Post-CP interviews	5 interviews with selected CP participants conducted 2-4 weeks after CP 4	Int_F04; Int_F09; Int_M01; Int_M05; Int_M10

Table 4.2: Data of the Austrian Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy

Sensitising concepts employed in the coding process

The coding and analysis of the collected data of the Austrian Citizens' Parliament followed the procedures and templates provided by the WP6 research coordinator Andreas Martin (OEAW). In the initial coding stage, codes were developed inductively from the data under four broad categories that were extracted from the research questions and sub-questions and the common coding tree template: media's democratic roles (Coding Tree 1, RQ1+1a), participatory process in the CP (Coding Tree 2, RQ2a+RQ1b+c), constructions of democracy (Coding Tree 2, RQ2b), constructions of media (Coding Tree 2, RQ2c). In the next stage, codes were categorized and

grouped hierarchically into categories and sub-categories, following the logic of the coding tree templates and inspired by sensitising concepts from the theoretical background that informs the research (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025). This categorisation was refined in an iterative process, leading into the next stage of theme identification. To develop themes, the identified codes and categories were used as a basis to formulate statements answering the research questions, as had been suggested by the WP6 research coordinator. These themes, categories and codes were then transferred into a Miro board to build up two coding trees following the coding tree templates. As the source language of the data material is in German, initial codes and categories were developed in German in MAXQDA and in the stage of theme identification translated into English.

The analytical process in and across research teams

The analysis of the Austrian Citizens' Parliament was managed in a team of three researchers from COMMIT. One main researcher was responsible for most of the coding, categorisation and analysis and the two secondary researchers assisted with parts of the compilation of data and initial coding and provided analytical support in writing the national research report.

- Main researcher: Andrea Sedlaczek
- Secondary researchers: Laurence Monnot, Helmut Peissl
- Ethnographic observers: Laura Derma (RQ1), Andrea Sedlaczek (RQ2)

After comparing and discussing the preliminary coding trees and findings of the four national WP6 teams together with the research coordinator, the coding trees were refined again, modifying and re-organizing some codes, categories and themes. For the national research report, the coding trees were used as the basis for answering the research questions. In this process, some themes were condensed to fit into the structure and scope of the report.

In line with the Participatory Action Research approach, the finalised report of the analysis was shared with the Citizens' Parliament participants, and they were invited to give feedback. While this invitation did not lead to any requests for changes to the content of the report, we received expressions of interest on reading the aggregated analysis of all four European Citizen's Parliament in an accessible language. This demonstrates the citizens' desire for seeing their own work in the CP in relation to the results of the other national Citizen's Parliaments.

4.3 Findings and analysis: Research question 1

Research question 1: How do the citizen parliament participants envision the democratic roles of media in their recommendations / resolutions for future perspectives and in the processes leading to these recommendations?

Secondary research questions:

a) What articulations of the media's democratic roles did the participants in the CP prioritise, which were omitted and which received only limited attention?
b) Which recommendations on future perspectives received consensus within the CP? Which future perspectives were the object of political struggle, and which ideological perspectives structured these differences?
c) How balanced were the power relations that characterized the process of producing the recommendations of the CP? How was conflict handled during the process? How was collaboration achieved during the process?

Overview of research question 1: Future perspectives for media's democratic roles

The Austrian Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy developed 50 resolutions (originally 53, as three resolutions were merged with a thematically linked one in the last consolidation process after CP 4), answering the fundamental question *"What needs to change in order for the media to support democracy in the best possible way?"* Resolutions were drafted in committees consisting of 4–5 citizens each and adopted by consent in the plenary, defined by the citizens as a resolution not receiving more than three vetoes. The process of producing the resolutions was characterized by a common commitment to collaboration and balanced power relations, which was supported by the facilitation method of Art of Hosting. All proposed resolutions were adopted, with 10 vetoes for 5 resolutions remaining after the plenary discussions:

- CP 2, Media systems & media regulation: 19 resolutions, 8 vetoes
- CP 3, Participation in and through the media: 19 resolutions (1 merged), 2 vetoes
- CP 4, Representation in the media: 15 resolutions (2 merged), no vetoes

In the deliberations and resolutions of the Austrian CP, all five of the democratic roles of media identified by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, pp. 52-64) are articulated, with a clear focus on three of them: the informational role, the representational role and the participatory role. As two of the CP sessions were explicitly devoted to the topics of representation and participation respectively, the focus on these two democratic roles is not surprising, while the informational role proved to be an overarching, recurring theme that was a particular focus of the discussions in the session on media systems and regulation. The watchdog role and forum role identified by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025) received only limited attention in the discussions and resolutions. The watchdog role was almost completely neglected and was only addressed implicitly in one resolution, while some aspects of the forum role were touched upon through intersecting issues with the participatory and representative roles. Table 4.3 gives an overview of the main themes that emerged in the articulations of media's democratic roles, the ideological perspectives that these are structured by and the process of producing the resolutions in the Austrian CP.

Research question 1	Themes
Media's democratic roles	Future perspectives for media's democratic roles are articulated for:
Informational role: Providing citizens with high-quality information	Media's democratic roles are supported by: • providing objective and balanced information • being transparent about internal processes • protecting and enforcing standards of quality journalism
Watchdog role: Controlling power holders	Media's democratic roles are supported by: • media being able to exercise their watchdog role to protect democracy
Forum role: Facilitating societal debate and democratic struggle	Media's democratic roles are supported by: • providing discussion spaces for societal debate • ensuring the quality of information on digital platforms
Representational role: Representing the pluriformity of the social and the political	**a. Representing social plurality** Media's democratic roles are supported by: • ensuring diversity on the three levels of the media, the audience and the content • representing the diversity of the Austrian society **b. Representing political plurality** Media's democratic roles are supported by: • educating citizens about democracy • representing a diversity of opinions in line with democratic values
Participatory role: Facilitating public participation in and through the media	**a. Facilitating participation through the media** Media's democratic roles are supported by: • facilitating political participation • removing barriers to access to quality media • enabling people to participate through media literacy and media education **b. Facilitating participation in the media** Media's democratic roles are supported by: • facilitating participation at a local and community level • ensuring safe participation on digital platforms
Political struggles and ideological differences over media's democratic roles	Political struggles over media's democratic roles in the CP are structured by: • interventionist vs. libertarian ideas on media regulation • absolute vs. regulated views on freedom of expression • utopian vs. realistic perspectives
Power relations, conflict and collaboration in developing future perspectives for media's democratic roles	The process of producing resolutions for future perspectives for media's democratic roles in the CP is characterised by: • a constructive collaboration • balancing power relations • strategies of persuasion and argumentation • navigating differences of opinion to avoid conflicts

Table 4.3: Overview of the main themes of Research question 1 concerning the articulation of the democratic roles of media in the Austrian CP and the process of producing resolutions

SRQ1a: Envisioning media's democratic roles

In this section, the way the Austrian Citizens' Parliament participants envision and prioritise the democratic roles of media in their resolutions for future perspectives and in the processes leading to these recommendations, is detailed.

Informational role: Providing citizens with high-quality information

The informational role of media in democracy was a strong focus of the Austrian CP. Particularly prevalent were issues concerning the regulation and funding of media based on the quality of information they provide.

Objectivity and balance

Providing objective and balanced information was seen as a central tenet for media's role in democratic societies by a lot of the citizens in the Austrian CP, and one that centrally determines whether citizens trust media or not. The citizens judged media coverage that they perceive to be "one-sided" or ideologically motivated and want media and journalists to be fair and impartial, especially when reporting on political issues.

> M07: "*Balanced information is needed to make decisions in a democracy."* (Obs2_CP1)

The citizens were, however, also aware of the limits of objectivity and the problem of "false balance" (cf. Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004) and this proved to be a point of struggle, as was expressed in one of the post-CP interviews:

> "*I can think of two or three participants who are of the opinion – and I don't think I need to bring up a specific topic here – that if there are 95 experts on a particular topic who share the same opinion and five experts who hold the opposite view, both opinions should still be adequately presented in all news reports. I don't quite agree with that, because I would rather trust the 95 one hundred percent than the five.*" (Int_M10)

Recognizing that "*journalists also have political views*" and that "*objectivity cannot be regarded as an absolute criterion*" (Obs2_CP1), the citizens call journalists to more clearly differentiate between fact-based and opinion-based content, which they feel lacking in a lot of media:

> "*The separation of fact-based and opinion-based content (e.g. report and comment) should be made more clearly identifiable in all media."* (Res16, CP2/2)

> "*It is actually sad that such a resolution is necessary. Quality journalism includes this separation. Recently, however, even newspapers that claim to offer quality journalism have deviated considerably from this principle.*" (Comm_Res16)

Transparency about internal processes

Transparency was seen as another important principle in the relationship between media and citizens in a democracy. Transparency was demanded both about internal journalistic processes (e.g. whether a medium has accreditation on the European level) and about financing, ownership and relevant stakeholders. The citizens adopted a resolution explicitly demanding transparency on fundings received, especially concerning state subsidies:

> "*For more transparency regarding funding decisions, media organisations should publish information on the funding they have received"* (Res15, CP2/2)

Standards of quality journalism

As part of the informational role of media, the citizens put a lot of emphasis on protecting and enforcing standards of quality journalism. The citizens intensely discussed what constitutes quality journalism and what quality criteria can be demanded from media that want to receive funding, especially in the form of state subsidies. The citizens mostly referred to authoritative institutions, such as the Austrian Press Council (as a self-regulatory entity) or the European Union (as a political body), to identify and impose standards based on common European values and academically justified quality criteria:

> *"The Press Council has established criteria for quality journalism and also comments on non-compliance with these criteria. Anyone who does not want to submit to this self-governing organisation of media companies and newspapers is likely to disregard the criteria as well. There should be no funding for that*." (Comm_Res06)

Watchdog role: Controlling power holders

The watchdog role of media was rarely discussed in the Austrian CP and mostly remained implicit as a central aspect of media's role as the "fourth estate". Especially the materialization of the watchdog role through investigative journalism was absent from the discussions, while it was linked to independent journalism in general.

Protecting democracy through the watchdog role

Media's role of controlling power holders was framed as a sign of a functioning relationship between media and democracy, as seen in a comment by a participant on the lessons she has learned from the Citizens' Parliament:

> F05: "*I have become even more aware of the enormous importance of the media as the fourth pillar of democracy. And secondly, on a personal level, how grateful I am to live in a country where the media still function as a watchdog, so to speak.*" (Aud_CP4/6)

Living in a country where media can exercise their watchdog role was contrasted with the situation in other countries, like the US, Hungary or Turkey, where the citizens see a healthy relationship between the media and political power holders as eroding through limits to media freedom and independent journalism. Supporting civil society and independent journalism in such countries "*where media freedom is under threat"* is one of the demands the citizens formulate in their resolutions (Res46, CP2-1).

Forum role: Facilitating societal debate and democratic struggle

Similar to the watchdog role, the forum role received limited attention in the discussions in the Austrian CP and was seldom described as such. There were, however, several aspects discussed in the sessions on the participatory and representational role of the media that intersect with the forum role as outlined in Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, pp. 56-58).

Providing discussion spaces for societal debate

The core of the forum role in providing discussion spaces for societal debate, as described by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, p. 57), is covered by the citizens in a resolution developed in the session on "participation in and through the media". In this resolution, which they address to the Austrian public service broadcaster ORF, they call for the creation of discussion spaces (which they explicitly call "discussion forums" in German) as a television format:

> "*We call for socially relevant topics to be discussed in prime-time television programmes from a wide range of opinions (e.g. reflection on the Covid measures, need for affordable housing, etc.). We see such programmes as a contribution to strengthening social cohesion. The prerequisites for success would be specially trained presenters and an invitation policy that gives space to different, but always fact-based opinions.*" (Res33, CP3/2)

The resolution emphasises the aim of the forum role as facilitating societal debate and democratic struggle through the negotiation of different perspectives as well as the importance of journalistic curation or gatekeeping, as it explicitly wants to exclude "non fact-based" voices.

Ensuring the quality of information on digital platforms

Another aspect the citizens discussed concerned the possibilities and constraints for digital platforms to offer an adequate forum role. In a space without journalistic curation, the citizens see dangers of widespread dis- and misinformation dominating the communication sphere. The citizens call for the regulation of platforms as media and suggest implementing technical (AI-based) tools to facilitate factchecking and transparency about content created by bots.

To fulfil a forum role, the citizens also see the necessity of adapting the algorithms of digital platforms to reduce the formation and hardening of "filter bubbles" in which people are not confronted with different views anymore but find themselves in echo chambers (Res50, CP4/2):

> *"This is a very important topic! More of the same simply leads to a false perception and the view that everyone thinks the same way you do anyway."* (Comm_Res50)

Representational role: Representing the pluriformity of the social & the political

In terms of the number of resolutions adopted, the representational role of media received less attention than the informational and participatory roles. The articulations of the representational role were, however, quite broad, encompassing both the representation of social plurality and political plurality, following Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, p. 59), with a common thread of ensuring a diversity of voices and opinions.

a. Representing social plurality

The representation of social plurality was not only discussed by the citizens in terms of media content, but also in terms of the diversity of people involved in production and addressed by the content.

Diversity on the three levels of the media, the audience and the content

Deliberating on the representation of social plurality, the citizens came up with their own categorisation by identifying three levels where diversity should be increased: 1. diversity in the media, i.e. in editorial teams, 2. diversity in the target audience that media address, and 3. diversity in the content, i.e. including majority and minority issues. These three levels were seen as interacting in various non-linear ways:

> F07: *"The composition of editorial teams does not have to be reflected in their content – a woman does not have to feel compelled to bring up women's issues."* (Obs2_CP4)

> F09: "*First, demand that the content becomes more diverse so that the audience becomes more diverse*." (Obs2_CP4)

> M05: "*How can media be supported in ensuring they are present on all channels (including underrepresented ones) – in an inclusive manner so that all target groups are reached?*" (Obs2_CP1)

While greater diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in editorial teams through legal quota regulations and incentives for minority groups can contribute to a greater representation of minority issues in the content, the citizens also propose the opposite approach: Media should strive for a diverse content to attract a more diverse audience and editorial staff, and they should try to reach as many people as possible through a diversity of channels.

Representing the diversity of the Austrian society

As part of their representational role, citizens acknowledge that media should represent the diversity of society, including minorities like migrants, and underrepresented groups such as people with a lower socioeconomic background or from rural regions. The citizens, however, also deliberated on the limits of representation: how much representations should reflect the actual distribution of certain groups in society and whether non-representation could be desirable for some communities to avoid stigmatization:

> F07: "*How do I deal with groups of people who make up only 1% of the population? How much do I represent them? Take transgender people, for example: many people get annoyed when this issue is brought up (too) often. Of course, this issue often serves as a proxy for other areas as well.*" (Obs2_CP4)

> F05: "*I have a friend who is the mother of a child with a developmental disorder. She does not want her child to be portrayed because she is afraid of stigmatization.*" (Obs1_CP4)

In all these discussions, the principle of a fair and respectful representation of different groups and communities was a common consensus. Citizens also recognized the importance of self-representation by minority groups, for which they saw community media as particularly suited.

To meet the representational needs of all social groups in society, the citizens also emphasised the importance of representing local and regional culture beyond the urban centres that are often focused on by mainstream media:

> "*We call on ORF to report on local/regional events based on suggestions from the population for at least 8 minutes per day in regional programmes throughout Austria.*" (Res43_CP4/3)

b. *Representing political plurality*

Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, p. 61) identify an educational and a protective sub-role for representing political plurality. Both sub-roles are present in some form in the deliberations of the Austrian CP.

Educational role: educating citizens about democracy

In the educational role, media – and especially PSBs – are called to educate citizens about democratic processes as part of political journalism. The citizens propose *"creative and innovative formats in the media"* that use concrete examples to illustrate and contextualise "*the democratic decision-making process of legislation in a clear and transparent manner"* to make it comprehensible (Res27, CP4/2):

> F09: "*Take the example of fully slatted floors: who decided on the long implementation period? You have to take current examples of political decision-making processes and examine them from all angles. That's what I find lacking. There's no need to talk about educational television; the term might be off-putting. It's better to focus on specific topics.*" (Obs1_CP4)

By focusing on current issues on the political agenda in the national context, the citizens see a potential in promoting a better understanding of how the democratic political system functions and how decision-making processes are objects of political struggle in a democratic state.

Protective role: representing a diversity of opinions in line with democratic value-discourses

The protective role is conceived in a broader sense than described in Carpentier and Wimmer (2025) and intersects with the forum role: According to the citizens, media should represent a diversity of political opinions while protecting democratic value-discourses, i.e. by not representing racist views that are not in line with the common democratic values and fundamental rights:

> F09: "*In Austria, discussions do not take place in a vacuum; see the commitment to human rights. What diversity of opinion is actually meant? Must racist views be discussed?*" (Obs1_CP4)

> F02: "*Balancing diverse opinions and ideologies. How can we bridge divides and build bridges?*" (Obs1_CP3)

The citizens thus want to deconstruct non-democratic perspectives and call racism by its name.

Participatory role: Facilitating public participation

The deliberation on the participatory role proved to be productive in terms of the number of resolutions adopted, which concerned both the facilitation of public participation *through* and *in* the media (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, pp. 62-63).

a. *Facilitating public participation through the media*

For facilitating participation *through* the media, the citizens deliberated both on supporting political participation in a narrower sense and on prerequisites for forming political opinions in a broader sense, which include the access to media and media literacy.

Facilitating political participation

The Austrian CP sees it as one of the media's tasks to increase citizens' motivation for political participation and suggest achieving this goal through the communication of best-practice examples:

> "*We call on media companies and politically active players to communicate best practice examples of political participation to the public in order to arouse more interest in participation processes.*" (Res25_CP3/4)

Removing barriers to access to quality media

For facilitating participation through the media in a broader sense, the citizens put a lot of emphasis on removing barriers to access to media. These barriers include language barriers and financial barriers that especially exclude disadvantaged groups, like minorities or groups with a low socioeconomic background, from accessing quality media.

For reducing language barriers, the citizens call for accessible media content, by journalists using plain and simple language, and by making media content available in multiple languages, including minority languages and sign language, for which the citizens suggest implementing technical AI-based translation tools (Res23, CP3/3). To remove financial barriers, citizens propose to make quality media publicly available in public spaces like municipal offices, outdoor swimming pools or doctor's offices – both in physical form as well as QR codes for online access:

> F09: "*I was impressed by the public reading room in Vienna's main library, where newspapers are available free of charge. Implement this in small communities, e.g. in municipal offices.*" (Obs2_CP3)

Another proposal was for media organisations to create donated media subscriptions, which the citizens called "*media sospeso*", analogous to the existing "Caffè sospeso" model, where customers in coffee shops can pay a coffee in advance for people in need (Res22, CP3/2).

Media literacy and media education as a prerequisite for participation

As participation in a democratic society is dependent on being able to use media adequately to form political opinions, the citizens emphasise media literacy and media education as a prerequisite for participation. The citizens define media education as a *"training in the critical consumption of different media"* and believe that not only educational organizations, but also the media themselves have a responsibility to contribute to media literacy:

> "*If media education is seen as training in the critical consumption of different media, media education should be firmly anchored in ORF's public service remit, e.g. through a fixed percentage of broadcasting time.*" (Res34, CP2/4)

> F08: "*Media literacy is an absolute prerequisite for participation. Private media outlets that receive funding must contribute to media literacy.*" (Obs1_CP2)

b. Facilitating public participation in the media

Facilitating public participation *in* the media was both directed towards traditional media and digital platforms as well as towards the preconditions for participation.

Participation at a local and community level

The citizens particularly want media to support participation at a local and community level beyond the urban centres where most mainstream media are based through creative outreach media work:

> F06: *"How can we get into small rural communities and enable participation in the media there?"* (Obs2_CP3)

> *"We call for the promotion of creative projects for outreach media work in public spaces with a focus on local issues (using the example of Cap Radio's Radio Truck in California)."* (Res38, CP3/2)

Increasing the societal status of non-commercial participatory community media and providing community media and their umbrella organisations with more funding for their work with communities is another measure that the citizens demand for facilitating more participation in the media – and for increasing the (self-)representation of minorities at the same time (Res09, CP2/2 & Res10, CP4/4).

> F09: *"Community media are closer to citizens; they are an important media sector."* (Comm_Res09)

Safe participation on digital platforms

As had been discussed in connection to the forum role, the citizens see dangers of widespread disinformation as well as hate speech dominating the communication sphere on digital platforms. The citizens call on the platform owners to implement technical (AI-based) tools or processes to moderate content and to ensure the possibility of criminal prosecution for illegal content within democratic limits to ensure a safe participation, where people are also accountable for their content:

> *"We call for the development of concepts as the basis for a legal regulation to remove highly visible posts that are criminally relevant and to label highly visible posts that are problematic."* (Res49, CP2/1)

> *"The opening of accounts should require personal identification and a minimum age of 14 years. Personal data should be stored in encrypted form and only made accessible to the authorities for criminal prosecution*." (Res48, CP2/2)

SRQ1b: Consensus and political struggle in the Citizens' Parliament

The Austrian Citizens' Parliament chose to adopt resolutions by consent, meaning that all resolutions drafted in the committees that did not receive more than three vetoes in the plenary, were automatically adopted. As no resolution proposed by a committee received more than the threshold of three vetoes, all proposed resolutions were adopted. A lot of the political struggle over the recommendations on future perspectives thus happened in the committee work itself, where only one veto of a committee member was allowed for the drafted resolution

to go into the plenary. In the plenary, all resolutions drafted by the committees were evaluated individually. Participants could put green dots as an affirmative vote to up to 10 resolutions and raise their vetoes with a red dot and an accompanying written justification.

Apart from affirmative votes and vetoes, the opportunity of voicing dissenting and confirmatory comments in the online resolutions survey after the CP sessions was rarely used by the citizens. The surveys only garnered one to two comments per resolution. The majority are confirmatory comments that are either simple affirmative expressions (e.g. *"Great idea!"* / "*Very good!*") or add a more detailed justification for the validity of the resolution. Only two comments were explicitly dissenting, while several comments are questioning, as they voice uncertainty either about the objective behind the resolution or its feasibility in practice.

Table 4.4 gives an overview of the resolutions that gained wide-spread consensus with a high number of affirmative votes, and the resolutions that were the object of political struggle by receiving vetoes and low affirmative votes.

Resolutions with the highest consensus (10+ affirmative votes)	**Resolutions with most political struggle (with vetoes and low affirmative votes)**
• Transparency in funding decisions for state subsidies (Res14a, Res14b) • Educating about democracy and promoting democratic participation through and in the media (Res27, Res25, Res01a, Res01b) • Representation of the diversity of the Austrian society, especially by PSBs (Res44) • Factual reporting on political topics at municipal level (Res30) • Media education by PSBs, adult education and educational institutions (Res34, Res37b, Res35, Res38) • Providing discussion spaces in PSBs, on digital platforms and in municipalities (Res33, Res50, Res32) • Strengthening diversity in media content and editorial teams (Res02, Res40) • Quality assurance of the European media system (Res45) • Reducing language barriers through accessible media (Res23, Res26)	• Direct line of communication in EU reporting through accreditation (Res18) • Taxation of large media and digital platforms (Res47) • Safeguarding quality journalism through the Austrian Press Council with legal and financial sanctions (Res07) • Call for a popular petition on media quality by the Austrian Press Council (Res19) • Restriction of funding for free daily newspapers (Res08) • Removing financial barriers by facilitating (online) access to quality media (Res21, Res20) • Ensuring the quality of information on digital platforms through personal identification (Res48)

Table 4.4: Consensus and political struggle over resolutions in the Austrian CP

Generally, many of the resolutions receiving vetoes or dissenting and questioning comments also received low affirmative votes. Resolutions gaining low affirmative votes (1–3) without vetoes demand low-threshold local opportunities for active participation in the media (Res24), funding for journalist training (Res04) and funding for community media (Res09). These point to issues that are seemingly low-priority to most of the citizens without outright rejecting them. The highest discordancy between affirmative votes and vetoes can be seen in a resolution

demanding restrictions of funding for free daily newspapers (Res08), which received ten affirmative votes, but originally also three vetoes. One veto remained intact even after the resolution was amended in the plenary discussion by adding the compliance to standards of quality journalism as a qualifier, as the resolution intended to mainly restrict free tabloids that are based on advertising revenues.

From the resolutions receiving the highest support, a general consensus can be seen on the need for transparency in media funding through the state (Res14a receiving 18 affirmative votes), on the importance of media and democracy education, on representation of diversity, and on strengthening opportunities for citizens' dialogue. In connection to these issues, there was also a strong consensus that the public service broadcaster ORF has a special mandate to fulfil its representational and educational role. From the resolutions receiving vetoes, dissenting or questioning comments, three main themes of ideological differences emerge that structure the political struggle in the CP.

Interventionist vs. libertarian perspectives on media regulation

The tension between media freedom and media regulation led to most of the vetoes and political struggles in the Austrian CP. A common concern raised about the proposed resolutions that demanded regulatory measures by the state, especially those involving financial benefits or restrictions, such as subsidies, taxation or sanctions, was that they could lead to censorship or corruption, by restricting media freedom and interfering with the free market principle:

> M03: "*Linking media and politics raises concerns about censorship.*" (Vet_Res19)

> "*I am particularly unhappy with one resolution (securing quality journalism through politics), as I believe it unnecessarily creates a relationship of closeness and dependency between politics and the media industry. Since the proposal received only a few green points, I am sure that other people were also unconvinced but did not say anything.*" (Sur_CP3)

> M01: "*Well, I found it difficult because I also like the idea of newspapers being available free of charge in public places. But I fear that this demand, if you think it through, could lead to corruption if the federal government buys a lot of newspapers to distribute them somewhere, so to speak. Then taxpayer money would be used to buy newspapers. And who decides which newspapers are purchased? […] And then it would also seem a bit random which newspapers are promoted and which are not.*" (Aud_CP3/7)

This struggle over the degree of state intervention could be solved in some cases, by adding quality criteria as a qualifier, where these were seen as being defined and evaluated independent from the political power-holders. One of the interviewees in the post-CP interviews reflected on the tension between freedom and control in the CP deliberations and points to common fundamental democratic value-discourses as a framework to overcome these differences:

> *"In the discussion, you often saw different directions, where you say, okay, more control or more freedom. And between these two extremes, there is simply a lot of ground where the discussion was centred. When you talk about media systems, it's easy to say, okay, open to everything. And everyone can do anything. And then at some point you have the problem that things get out of hand, which we are now seeing to some extent in the area of digital platforms and the like. And on the other hand, there are those that see the need to regulate. And how strictly, how strongly. Then again, for some people like me it would be relatively easy to say,*

> *okay, there are certain fundamental values in the EU or in democracy that can be defined and then used as a framework, so to speak. And some people immediately cry censorship. Because it's terrible, when you have to abide by something. And it is precisely this area of tension that we have not only in this discussion, but in democracy in general."* (Int_M05)

Absolute vs. regulated views on freedom of expression

Intersecting with media freedom, different ideological perspectives also emerged around freedom of expression, with absolute versus regulated views being articulated, especially in connection to the regulation of digital platforms to prevent "fake news" and hate speech, as this exchange from a committee captured in one of the observer reports shows:

> M07: *"Is freedom of expression the highest good? Find a support system that identifies hate speech (using AI, for example)."*
> F01: *"Develop tools that automatically detect hate speech."*
> M07: *"Mandatory fact-check button."*
> F09: *"But that's a restriction of freedom of speech and expression."*
> F01: *"Distinguish between topics that are discussed on the basis of facts and topics that are discussed ideologically (e.g., does God exist?)."*
> M07: *"The problem is where to draw the line and who sets these boundaries. Questions of faith should not be discussed but hate speech can be defined/named."* (Obs1_CP2)

The Citizens' Parliaments resolutions between feasibility and utopianism

Another political struggle that structured the deliberations of the Austrian CP concerned the objective of the CP itself as an instrument of democratic decision-making with its resolutions. While some citizens saw participating in democratic deliberation as a citizen in the CP as an opportunity to develop bold demands, regardless of their actual political implementation, other citizens expressed concerns over proposed resolutions that seemed to them too vague or unfeasible, as this exchange that was captured in one of the observer reports demonstrates:

> M01: *"We make demands, but we don't have to implement them."*
> M08: *"What's the point of that? That is unrealistic for implementation – it would be like a 'letter to Father Christmas'."* (Obs2_CP2)

Several comments to resolutions question whether it is realistic that the resolution could or would actually be implemented by decision-makers, giving remarks like "*I don't think that's feasible*" (Comm_Res43) or "*That sounds utopian, but it would be highly desirable.*" (Comm_Res30).

This concern over the feasibility of resolutions points to the earnestness and engagement of many of the citizens, who took their participation in the Citizens' Parliament as an opportunity to contribute to Austrian society on an issue that they feel strongly about. Citizens who were more open to embracing seemingly utopian ideas, on the other hand, were often more interested in experiencing the Citizens' Parliament as a democratic process, regardless of the eventual political implementation of the adopted resolutions.

SRQ1c: Power relations, conflict and collaboration in the Citizens' Parliament

Most of the collaboration in the Austrian Citizens' Parliament was managed in a courteous way, with balanced power dynamics and with minimal conflict. The citizens used various strategies to achieve collaboration, to balance power relations and to avoid or navigate potential conflicts.

Constructive collaboration in the development of resolutions

Working in small committees of 4-5 citizens each enabled a close and constructive collaboration in drafting resolutions. Each committee was tasked to choose a moderator among themselves, who should guide the deliberations and oversee the voting process for approving the drafted resolutions within the committee (using thumb signals for Great!, OK and veto). Apart from the moderator, committees frequently assigned different roles within the group, some people taking notes and some being tasked to write down the drafted resolutions in the template provided by the organisers (consisting of a title, an addressee and the demand/recommendation along with a reason for it).

> *F07 takes notes on laptop, F08 writes down the proposal – M05 moderates the table and 'dictates' from his notes.* (Obs2_CP3)

Resolutions were developed in two main ways on the basis of the sub-topics assigned to the committee: Either the committee members entered into a longer discussion about the given sub-topic, taking notes and using these notes to develop a resolution. Or one committee member put forward a concrete proposal for a resolution as a start to a discussion. Some committees collected several proposals for resolutions before voting on all of them, others finished one resolution before continuing to the next sub-topic. In the process of formulating the resolution, the committee members frequently complemented each other, suggesting different wordings, adding to each other's suggestions:

> "*All group members help with suggestions for individual words in the wording. M06 makes a suggestion for sorting sub-items within the written resolution. M03 reads out the suggestion, F02 adds something. M09 adds something*." (Obs2_CP2)

> "*And several other colleagues who were there have confirmed this, in terms of their attitude: Out of two stupid ideas, a third person can come up with a new, good idea. So there are no stupid ideas that are stupid at first glance. Don't immediately say, 'Nonsense, that won't work, it can't be done.' Just let it be. Just think about it. Let it sink in, even if only a little. And maybe a second stupid idea will come along at some point. And a third person will later find that if you take a little bit away from this and a little bit away from that, or take something from this and something from that, something completely new will come out of it.*" (Int_M10)

Balancing power relations

The citizens were mindful of enabling a balanced participation by all CP members, which they had emphasised when agreeing on their own rules of discussion in the first CP session, and which they mostly followed through, by being respectful, giving everyone the opportunity to speak their opinions, listening without interrupting and asking for clarification to really understand one another.

> "*Mutual support and respect for different opinions is palpable and important for achieving results*." (Sur_CP2)

> "*In addition, I did my best to listen carefully to the other participants and ask questions*." (Sur_CP1)

> "*Because that's exactly what it's all about. That all contributions are relevant and that, of course, some people need to be encouraged by the moderator to get more involved, while others need to be reined in*." (Int_M05)

Sometimes, the citizens intentionally varied between different assigned roles within the committees and the plenary to enable a balanced participation, e.g. differentiating between a moderator of the committee and a member who presents the drafted resolutions in the plenary:

> *M05 does not want to volunteer for the presentation because he has already had the role many times before*. (Obs2_CP3)

> M09: "*I was given the task of presenting because the various roles were divided up among the group*." (Obs2_CP4)

As is common in all group dynamics, there were some participants who were dominant in the deliberations, frequently taking over a moderating role or taking a lead in the discussion. Sometimes there were also gender and age dynamics at play, with male and older participants being perceived as dominating, against which other participants tried to resist:

> "*However, with a few groups, I had the feeling that certain dynamics were forming, depending on who was in the group. Occasionally, but not often, the older participants tended to speak up more, and they were then listened to more/more readily*." (Sur_CP2)

> "*Yes, well, there are just a few male egos, let's say, who easily assert themselves because they are simply loud and often repeat their point. Maybe I'm one of them too*." (Int_M01)

> *F08 repeatedly asserts her right to speak as the only woman in the group: 'Excuse me, may I?', thereby interrupting M01 or M08*. (Obs2_CP2)

While some of these power dynamics can be restrictive in the moment, there was also productive power when members took the lead or insisted on being more critical to move things on or ensure a better outcome of the process:

> "*We have seen time and again that someone else has prevailed, and of course it was extremely relevant who wrote what, who took the lead in which committee, so to speak. So, in my view, there have been very significant differences. Did I take the lead myself and make sure things kept moving forward, to put it simply, or did I leave it alone and consciously take a back seat? Then, of course, the result was different from what I had imagined or what I would have liked*." (Int_M05)

> "*During the discussion about the resolutions, I found myself in an unfamiliar role, acting as the dragon, so to speak, questioning the contributions of others and repeatedly arguing against overly general formulations and in favour of more concrete demands. I was ultimately satisfied with the result*." (Sur_CP4)

Strategies of persuasion and argumentation in the CP

Following from the power dynamics, different strategies could be observed that CP members used to try to persuade or convince others. Declaring and negotiating their authority was one of the most frequent strategies, which could take three broad, sometimes intersecting forms: declaring authority based on personal biographical experience (example 1), based on acquired knowledge (examples 2 and 3) or based on professional experience (examples 3 and 4):

> M07: "*Teaching media literacy is a matter for teachers.*"
> M04: "*From my own perspective as a father, I believe that parents have a greater responsibility in this regard.*" (Obs2_CP3)

> M10: *"I have been involved with media and politics for 60 years." – He quotes something he already mentioned in an earlier group work: 'The greatest threat to democracy is not its enemies, but the indifference of its friends.'* (Obs2_CP3)

> *M09 was at the Commission's permanent representation and noticed that the Kronen Zeitung newspaper is not accredited in Brussels and writes a lot of negative things about the EU. He sees this as a problem*. (Obs2_CP2)

> *F08 mentions that she comes from a background in recreational education and has previously explained the existing media centre in Vienna to the others*. (Obs1_CP2)

While these forms of declaring authority could be productive, when knowledge is shared and used for the collaborative development of resolutions, there were also instances of participants acknowledging their lack of expertise on a subject, while still trying to persuade the others of their opinion:

> M01: "*I'm no educator, but I think it's not unrealistic to demand media education from the age of four*."
> M08: "*There may be more competent people (than us) who can decide at what age media education is appropriate*."
> F08: "*Use the phrase 'as soon as possible' as a compromise*." (Obs2_CP2)

Strategies to avoid and navigate conflicts

The citizens used active strategies to navigate differences of opinion that could not be bridged. Some participants avoided conflicts by remaining silent in the discussion and not entering into an argument when ideological differences were too great, as one of the interviewees reflects:

> *"I think M06, who initially showed some tendencies towards conspiracy theory groups, restrained himself very much. I spoke to him twice in two sessions and wanted to find out a bit more about him, but he wasn't very talkative, although he did engage in conversation. I rarely meet people who come so strongly from that background, so it was a bit of a missed opportunity, but in that setting, there was no other way. It needs continuity and more opportunities to talk*." (Int_F09)

Trying to put an end to a prolonged debate and changing the topic of discussion was another strategy used when faced with a seemingly unsolvable difference of opinion, as the following exchange from the observer reports demonstrates:

> F07: *"Addressing the audience using simple language, sign language, etc."*
> M05: *"But quality must be the basis."*
> F07: *"I disagree with you on one point: you don't have to compromise on quality when using simple language."*
> *F07 and M05 discuss this.*
> F07: *"It's just a different way of presenting things. We're just splitting hairs here."*
> *F07 changes the subject.* (Obs2_CP4)

While the participants frequently remarked that everyone tried their best to follow their own discussion rules and to stay respectful and constructive, even when faced with differences of

opinion, they also reported some instances of single participants being non-courteous, dismissing or non-constructive in the debate:

> "*There were a few differences of opinion in the small groups and some negative reactions to the comments made by others (in terms of facial expressions/gestures, rolling eyes, etc.). However, the negotiations in the committees were generally positive!*" (Sur_CP3)

> "*With a few, really, two or three, I had the impression that he just had to disagree somehow. But that's the way it is in every group. So I don't think it's that negative, because I see it as a fact*." (Int_M10)

> "*And on the other hand, some people who perhaps – in my opinion – criticise without really offering any concrete solutions*." (Int_M05)

Sometimes, the discussion became so dysfunctional or deadlocked that the participants had to rely on mediation or support from the facilitators to resolve the situation:

> *The facilitator gets involved. She tells M01 that if three people are not in favour, even though he, M01, has argued well, he must scale back his request*. (Obs1_CP3)

> *F02 brings in the facilitator as a mediator, because their group is having trouble working through the questions and their discussion is not progressing. The co-facilitator also joins them. The facilitator suggests a method – the 'wicked question game' – as a creative inspiration to help them move forward. The group moves to another room with the facilitators so as not to disturb the other committees.* (Obs1_CP4 & Obs2_CP4)

The last example also demonstrates how conflicts or struggles between the citizens could arise from structural limitations of the CP design itself. As the committees drafted resolutions based on thematically clustered sub-topics assigned to them at random by the organising team, they frequently had to work on sub-topics that were posed by CP members not in their group. This sometimes proved challenging and lead to frustration expressed by the citizens within the committees or in the plenary, where these struggles were sometimes brought up to qualify or justify the (perceived lack of quantitative) output from a committee:

> *F08 says that after the first two resolutions, which they developed quickly, it was difficult for her committee to develop anything from the remaining four unclear sub-topics*. (Obs2_CP3)

4.4 Findings and analysis: Research question 2

Research question 2: How are democracy and media constructed in the participatory process of the citizen parliament?

Secondary research questions:

a) How is participation performed in the CP? Which (sub)processes are forms of minimalist / maximalist participation?
b) How is democracy constructed in the CP? Which core components are accepted (or not), and how do the citizens in the CP position themselves towards the relevant political struggles and threats?
c) How are media constructed in the CP? Which core components are accepted (or not), and how do the citizens in the CP position themselves towards the relevant political struggles and threats?

Overview of research question 2: Constructions of media and democracy in the CP

The Citizens' Parliament as an instrument of citizens' participation and contribution to policy-making is a space, where the citizens not only talk about media and democracy, but where they also get the opportunity to *do* democracy – encompassing both dimensions of participation and representation. The format of the CP clearly emphasises maximalist participation and the redistribution of power by giving opportunity to all participants to be heard and to contribute. In the Austrian CP, the decision-making process of consent was also chosen as a form of maximalist participation, to strive for consensus while giving voice to minority opinions. At the same time, some processes of the CP created the conditions for more minimalist forms of participation and the delegation of responsibility as enactments of representation.

Their own experience of participating in the CP also influenced the citizens in how they positioned themselves towards democracy in general and towards the relevant political struggles and threats they identified in Austrian society – including both the status of representation and the opportunities of citizen participation.

In contrast to democracy, which was both discursively constructed and enacted by the participants in the CP, media were only objects of discursive practices, as the participants did not produce media themselves in the CP. Discursive constructions of media and of the relevant political struggles and threats were present throughout the deliberations of the CP.

Table 4.5 gives an overview of the main themes of the citizens' discursive constructions and enactments of democracy and media in the Austrian CP.

Research question 2	Themes
The participatory process in the CP	**a. Participation in the CP** Participation in the CP is talked about and enacted as: • an experience of a collaborative democratic process • an opportunity for participating in democratic decision-making • a good-practice example of citizens' dialogue • a way of decision-making with the need to find solutions without making poor compromises **b. Representation in the CP** Representation in the CP is talked about and enacted by: • negotiating the responsibility of the facilitators and organisers • selecting representatives of the CP • participating as a member of a minority group
Constructions of democracy in the CP	**a. Discursive practices of representation in society** Representation in society is talked about by claiming that: • representative democracy is not enough • authoritarian developments are a threat to democracy **b. Discursive practices of participation in society** Participation in society is talked about by claiming that: • democracy needs an engaged civil society • citizen participation in society should be strengthened • bubbles and the "ideological divide" in society should be reduced • there are rights and limits to freedom of speech • media education is a prerequisite for participation
Constructions of media in the CP	The media are talked about by claiming that: • there is a shifting trust in different media • a diversity of media is needed to meet the democratic needs of citizens • media should maintain their role as the fourth estate • there should be transparency and independence in media funding through the state • the commercial interests driving media development are separate from the interests of citizens and journalistic standards • the development of digital platform media has created a world that is challenging for citizens to navigate

Table 4.5: Overview of the main themes of research question 2 concerning the constructions of media and democracy in the Austrian CP

SRQ2a: The participatory process in the Citizens' Parliament

The participatory process of the CP encompasses both the ways the citizens enact participation and representation and the ways they reflect on these enactments during and after the process of the CP (e.g. in the check-in and check-out during each session, the feedback surveys and the post-CP interviews). While most of these processes aim at a maximalist participation, some also create the conditions for more minimalist participation.

Participation in the Citizens' Parliament

Four main themes emerged from the participants' discursive constructions about participation in the CP that are also reflected in their enactment of participation.

The CP as an experience of a collaborative democratic process

The citizens regard the CP as an opportunity to experience democracy first-hand, by participating in a democratic process. The citizens experienced this process as being demanding and at times exhausting, but also very rewarding, giving them the feeling of exercising a fundamental civil right in democracy:

> "*In terms of the process, I would say that the most exciting part was developing these decision-making methods and also agreeing on them. That is, how do we decide, what is the process behind it? Because I am familiar with this mainly from local councils or similar bodies, or from various associations and the like*." (Int_M05)

> "*It was a very exhausting negotiation process at times. The fact that we actually managed to pull it off, that we experienced a citizens' parliament from start to finish, was a great feeling. I felt very 'democratic' at that moment. :D"* (Sur_CP4)

The CP is envisioned as a space where everyone can contribute and "*every contribution counts, which is what makes a CP so valuable because of the different contributions, which usually complement each other automatically*." (Sur_CP1). Even participants who were more reserved or kept silent a lot had something to contribute, as was experienced by one of the interviewees:

> "*For me, the neologism 'de-bubbling', which was coined by a participant who was otherwise very quiet and reserved, was something I really didn't expect, that something meaningful would actually come from him. And we thought it was the right contribution at the right moment. You really noticed, everyone else was happy about the contribution, and it was valuable at that moment, and overall for the process, in my opinion*." (Int_M05)

The participants presented themselves as very motivated to make their own contribution to the collaborative process of the CP, leading to interesting displays of performance pressure, both on an individual and group level. Individually, participants frequently rated and compared their own "performance" or perceived level of participation with qualitative or quantitative evaluations. They particularly reflect on how much they could individually contribute to the deliberations and whether their contribution had tangible effects in the output and outcome of the sub-topics and the drafted and adopted resolutions.

> "*Positive, I spoke up several times, contributed to the group work and presented our results in the plenary session once*." (Sur_CP1)

> "*On average, I was able to put two topics on the little Post-Its, but they didn't find any resonance*." (Sur_CP1)

> "*Looking back now, I would say that my participation was mediocre, or average. I actually let the others do most of the talking. I did contribute some of my ideas and opinions here and there. That's partly positive, partly negative, but it's completely normal*." (Int_M10)

This individual performance pressure also extended to the group level, where some competitive thinking emerged between the committees concerning the number of resolutions drafted.

During the end of the allotted time of the committee work, committee members repeatedly negotiated whether they had already drafted "enough" resolutions or whether they should use the remainder of the time to try to develop more. Committee representatives also frequently felt the need to justify their level of output in the plenary presentation:

> *Committee 1 has only made two proposals so far. M10 thinks they could already be satisfied. F08 finds it a bit unsatisfactory*. (Obs2_CP3)

> F05: "*It doesn't look like much, but we really discussed for a long time*." (Obs1_CP4)

At the same time, the citizens were aware that the collaborative process was dependent on individual people being able to balance between assertiveness and restraint relating to their own concerns to achieve results together:

> M05: "*You also have to be willing to restrain yourself in order to reach a consensus*." (Obs1_CP1)

> "*Did I take the lead myself and make sure things kept moving forward, to put it simply, or did I leave it alone and consciously take a back seat?*" (Int_M05)

Additionally, the citizens identified lack of time and lack of sufficient knowledge as the main constraints for developing resolutions together.

> "*I would like to have more time for discussion. In general, I would like to have more time...but that is a scarce resource*." (Sur_CP2)

> "*The constant time pressure did slow us down a bit during the discussions*." (Sur_CP2)

> "*I also feel 'uninformed' and not qualified enough to formulate such resolutions (that they are also tenable)*." (Sur_CP2)

> "*I found it very difficult to draft a truly concrete resolution because I feel that we simply don't know enough about the subject*." (Sur_CP2)

The CP as an opportunity for participating in democratic decision-making

The citizens do not only want to make their contribution within the CP process, they also see their participation as an opportunity to contribute to society at large through the adopted resolutions. From the very beginning of the application process and the first check-in in the first session of the CP, members presented themselves as being very committed and passionate about developing demands and recommendations that can have an impact on society and influence policy-making in the intersection of media and democracy:

> "*You can really sense that all participants are very interested in the topic and are eager to contribute*." (Sur_CP1)

To be able to have a real impact on society, the citizens were keen to discuss and decide who the relevant decision-makers are that the resolutions should be addressed to.

> M08: "*Who are the resolutions aimed at? Specific names/addressees? Are they already aware of this?*" (Obs2_CP1)

> F02: "*Who is our contact person? To whom do we submit our demands/resolutions?*" (Obs1_CP2)

Following the wishes of the participants for more guidance in this regard, the organising team created a template for the drafting of resolutions that included the addressee together with a title and the demand/recommendation (along with a reason for it). The wish for societal impact also led to participants frequently questioning the feasibility of suggested resolutions, i.e. whether the resolutions will be implemented or if they will be ignored by the addressees:

> *"What makes me a little uncertain is whether all of this (or even part of it) can be implemented with the savings measures that are already in place or are coming. Or actually the fear that too many people will think: 'Ha, nice idea, but we don't have the money for that.'"* (Sur_CP3)

The CP as a good-practice example of citizens' dialogue

Apart from the concrete results, the citizens frequently expressed their appreciation about the Citizen's Parliament as a space where they could enter into a dialogue and discussion with a wide range of people they would not normally meet in their own lives – both in terms of their socio-economic background as well as their political opinions. Particularly in the last check-out in CP 4, the citizens unanimously called this experience of exchange with a diversity of people as *"enriching"*:

> "*I always find it particularly interesting to hear what other people think about topics that I often think about. Usually, you don't get to talk to people who have completely different opinions*." (Int_M01)

> M09: *"When working in the groups, a clever person once said: I don't agree with you, but I will do everything I can to ensure that you can continue to express your opinion. And when you see how Hungary and other countries are doing, it reinforces my feeling, what a fortunate world we still live in*." (Aud_CP4-6)

The facilitation method of Art of Hosting, together with the self-commitment of all participants, created the conditions for enabling this pleasant, productive and respectful atmosphere. In CP 1, the citizens agreed on their own rules for discussion, which included being polite and respectful, not interrupting others and making sure all voices are heard, balancing one's own speaking time, but also being open to humour and laughter together. The observer reports, but also the feedback of the participants give frequent evidence that the citizens complied with their own rules:

> *"Very pleasant atmosphere, the participants adhered to the rules they had set themselves to a high degree."* (Sur_CP1)

> *People listen; they don't interrupt.* (Obs1_CP1)

> *The group jokes and laughs while voting*. (Obs2_CP3)

Decision-making in the CP: The need to find solutions without making poor compromises

When deliberating on their own rules of procedure, the method of decision-making the citizens want to adopt proved to be a contentious issue. While many citizens wanted to strive for consensus, others were against forcing consensus and were in favour of a majority vote. Concerns were raised both that minority voices should not be ignored and that there should not be "bad compromises". Proposals that the wording of resolutions could be adapted in such

"broad or loose terms that many feel represented" (Obs2_CP1) were countered with a concern against overly vague resolutions.

The facilitators proposed consent as a method that could balance all needs, striving to find a solution that works for the majority, while giving the opportunity for minority positions to be expressed by vetoes. The citizens approved this method, and after some discussion set themselves the flexible limit of three vetoes in the plenary for a resolution to still be adopted – depending on the overall number of vetoes during a session and the available time for discussions to try to integrate vetoes.

Within the committees (consisting of 4-5 participants each), consent was also sought, but only one veto allowed for the drafted resolution to be brought into the plenary. As vetoes had to be justified and documented, decision-making by consent enabled maximalist participation, allowing everyone to have a visible impact, express their opinion, and focus on collaboration.

> *"As I said, it was structured in such a way that people were interested in finding a consensus together in these small groups, and then people tended to make an effort to have a fruitful discussion."* (Int_M01)

Decision-making by consent also implied that there were two types of approval: affirmation („Great!"), expressed by a thumbs-up in the committees and a green dot in the plenary, and acceptance („OK"), expressed by a sideways thumb in the committees and by raising no veto in the plenary. This lead to some resolutions being adopted that were „good enough" for the majority of the citizens, even when they were not totally convinced by it, which was noted by one participant in the feedback survey:

> *"I am particularly unhappy with one resolution (securing quality journalism through politics), as I believe it unnecessarily creates a relationship of closeness and dependency between politics and the media industry. Since the proposal received only a few green points, I am sure that other people were also unconvinced but did not say anything."* (Sur_CP3)

This can also lead to more minimalist forms of participation, as participants are encouraged to trust the output of the other committees and to only raise vetoes if they have a strong objection. Some participants questioned whether some resolutions were only approved because of a lack of commitment by the other participants to raise vetoes:

> *"At the end of the day, when everyone was a bit exhausted, when we were supposed to cast our vetoes, I was sometimes the only one who did so. I thought that this should have been an important instrument, so to speak, to get back into the debate."* (Int_M01)

Representation in the Citizens' Parliament

While the format of the Citizens' Parliament was generally striving for (maximalist) participation, there were some instances, where the citizens had to delegate responsibility, either to representatives among themselves or to the facilitators and organising team, leading to the emphasis of representation and more minimalist forms of participation.

Negotiating the responsibility of the facilitators and organisers

As the process of the Citizens' Parliament was largely determined in advance and was new to most of the participants, the citizens were aware and acknowledged the responsibility of the

facilitators and the organising team to make certain decisions. Some of these decisions were appreciated, others were questioned at times, such as the composition of the committees, the allocation of sub-topics or the allocation of time to different sections, as these put constraints to the possibility of maximalist participation.

> "*I am generally very satisfied, but I think that one group was too weak. I would be very interested to know what criteria (apart from gender, age, etc.) were used to put the groups together*." (Sur_CP3)

> "*Too little time for discussion of the resolutions and their wording. I know there are always complaints that there is not enough time for this, but just over an hour in the committees out of a total of almost eight hours in a day is still not enough. Because that is what it is actually all about in terms of content*." (Sur_CP3)

The citizens appreciated interventions by the facilitators and organisers, where they supported the process and could improve the results. Especially the assurance that there would be an editorial revision process of the resolutions after the CP sessions relieved the citizens from the pressure to have to come up with perfect wordings:

> "*I'm somewhat satisfied. I would appreciate more precise wordings. I also feel 'uninformed' and not qualified enough to formulate such resolutions (that are also tenable) – i.e. I think it's great that the team is reviewing them again and, if necessary, rephrasing/adjusting them*." (Sur_CP2)

> "*The support during the committee work was important here! I think this appreciative support is incredibly important in order to achieve the desired results in terms of the demands*." (Sur_CP3)

Selecting representatives of the CP

Within the CP process, different types of representatives among the CP members were chosen. At the end of CP 2, CP 3 and CP4, one member of each committee had to volunteer as a spokesperson to review and approve the editorial revisions of the resolutions, which were suggested by the organising team. The spokespeople were frequently identical with the CP members who had acted as moderator and/or as presenter for the committee during the CP session. There was one participant who volunteered as the spokesperson for all three committees he was a part of, which he had also consistently moderated and in two sessions also presented. (This CP member was also the only one who nominated himself to act as a representative in the national presentation). In other cases, the committee spokespeople were more varied and especially in CP 4 also included participants that had not had moderating or presenting roles before, ensuring a wider distribution of responsibility.

For selecting representatives for the national presentation of the resolutions in Vienna in June 2025, all participants were invited to nominate CP members they felt would be best suited for this role:

> M04: "*F03 and M05 had the best presence.*"
> M11: "*F07 is very competent and always got to the point in the group work*."
> M07: "*I nominated myself because I have a lot to contribute. I can be a valuable member of the presentation team*."
> F07: "*F08 is very thoughtful and appreciative, very calm and confident*."

F08: "*F09 is competent and can represent us well as a group.*" (Obs2_CP4)

One nominated participant declined to take on a representative role as he did not feel committed enough. A secret ballot was then held in several rounds, with all participants writing their first choice from among the (remaining) nominees on a slip of paper and the nominee with most votes being chosen. This was repeated until four representatives had been found – as there was a tie between two nominees in the third round, no fourth round was necessary.

For selecting the two representatives for the European presentation in the European parliament in Brussels in January 2026, a different selection process was chosen: CP members could express their interest, and the organising team drew lots to choose one male and one female representative from the eligible candidates after the date of the presentation had been fixed.

Representation through participation as a member of a minority group

A special form of representation was enacted by one CP member with a non-Austrian nationality, who positioned herself as a "voice for migrants" and who participated in the CP to ensure that their needs and perspectives are represented in the deliberations and resolutions.

> *As a person with non-Austrian citizenship who has been living in Austria for a long time, she wants to be a voice for people who are new to Austria (representative role). Through her participation, she wants to exercise her right to participate as a non-Austrian and at the same time show that these groups exist*. (Obs2_CP1)

> "*That was precisely my motive for participating, simply to be the voice of migrants, as I said before. And I always saw that as my duty*." (Int_F04)

SRQ2b: Constructions of democracy in the Citizens' Parliament

The citizens participated in the Citizen's Parliament to experience an instrument of citizens' participation and decision-making in democratic societies. They thus tended to share ideas about democracy that value participation over representation and that identify relevant political struggles and threats they perceive to dominate current Western democratic societies.

Discursive practices of representation in society

As there is a strong focus on participation in the CP, constructions of representation in society by the CP participants are limited, mostly by expressing frustration with the existing systems of representative democracy and institutionalised politics and pointing to dangers of increasing authoritarian developments in democratic societies.

Representative democracy is not enough

The definition of democracy is a contentious issue among Austrian CP members. While some mainly identify it with parliamentary elections or with the separation of powers principle, others call this restrictive idea into question and advocate for citizens' participation at the local level or through instruments of direct democracy:

> M09: "*For me, democracy means that when the election period is over, the members of parliament/government step down and we can vote again, i.e., there is a change of power.*" (Obs2_CP2)

> M01: *"It's not enough to vote every four years, and that being the extent of our democratic participation. I think that's why so many people are here (in the CP).*" (Aud_CP2/1)

> M01: *"Democracy means rule by the people, but to what extent does this apply to parliamentarianism, where only a few others (representatives) make the decisions? Councils existed in the past. Parliament is not democracy. There are intermediate steps in between."* (Obs2_CP1)

Participants express their own disillusionment or worry at seeing other citizens disillusioned by institutionalized politics:

> M04: *"I was politically active for a while and became disillusioned."* (Obs2_CP1)

> F09: *"Many people do not want to have anything to do with politics or engage with it."* (Obs2_CP3)

Authoritarian developments are a threat to democracy

The citizens are observing authoritarian developments in other countries such as Hungary, Turkey or the US with caution and see a threat in centralising power, abolishing many instruments of participation in society and restricting the democratic roles of media:

> F07: "*Democracy can abolish/destroy itself."* (Obs2_CP2)

> M07: *"The media and democracy relationship is currently eroding in countries such as the US, Hungary, and Turkey."* (Obs2_CP1)

Discursive practices of participation in society

Five themes emerged from the citizens' discursive constructions about participation in society, showing a strong focus on the demands and conditions for citizen participation.

Democracy needs an engaged civil society

Given the threats to democracy by authoritarian developments that the participants identify, they emphasise that democracy is not a status quo that can be taken for granted, but that it must be constantly questioned critically and fought for. Therefore, they see indifference to or disenchantment about politics as one of the biggest threats to democracy and call for engagement of the civil society:

> M10: "*The greatest threat to democracy is not its enemies, but the indifference of its friends."* (Obs2_CP3)

> *"Today, nobody – or at least fewer and fewer people – want to have anything to do with party politics, but there is certainly interest in politics in general and in certain issues."* (Int_M10)

The citizens emphasise that it is a civic right and duty for every citizen to participate. Civic participation extends beyond voting and encompasses the whole public sphere. The citizens thus recognise that democracy is not limited to formal, institutional politics, but that "everything is political":

> *All people, regardless of nationality, colour of skin, or religion, when they live in society—and they breathe here, they have the right to simply be able to participate in society – politically, economically."* (Int_F04)

> *"Political engagement often gets lost in everyday life. But everything is political, or in other words, your actions or inactions have an impact on those around you. It's important to understand that and to realize that you can make a difference and shape your environment (that your voice is important and will be heard)."* (Comm_Res29)

Getting informed is seen as part of this civic duty and consequently, citizens should be willing to pay or support quality media, while at the same time to be willing to opt against media that are not in line with democratic values:

> M08: "*Individual citizens also have a duty to inform themselves. Because if I want to have a say in decisions, then I need to inform myself about what I am deciding on"*. (Aud_CP2/1)

> F09: *"If a medium is important to you, you are willing to pay for it."* (Obs2_CP1)

> M07: *"Should media consumption cost money? Yes! After all, young people have no problem paying for music streaming on Spotify."* (Obs2_CP1)

> F03: *"The biggest threat to the current system would be if the majority of people decided to delete TikTok, etc."* (Obs2_CP2)

To motivate people to participate actively, the citizens also suggest promoting cooperations "*between adult education institutions (e.g., adult education centers) and civil society associations (such as soccer clubs, cultural associations, diaspora associations)*" (Res37, CP3/3).

Strengthening citizen participation in society

The citizens advocate for strengthening participation in society through different ways, like taking part in decision-making processes, especially at local level, or taking advantage of instruments of direct democracy and supporting the participation of minorities. Participation is presented as a civic need that is important to fulfil at all political levels:

> *"I think there should be more opportunities for people to discuss this issue and other issues that affect us as a population, to feel empowered and to actively participate in decision-making that is to say in democracy".* (Sur_CP4)

> F09: *"Democracy is for me when you can have a say in concentric circles. In my immediate environment, but I can also have a say in the district where I can vote and discuss. And then, there are larger circles, such as the city and the state. It would be important for democracy that all these concentric circles are connected to information and participation."* (Aud_CP2/1)

One of the citizens' resolutions addressed to municipalities and local civil society organizations calls for "*low-threshold local initiatives to promote civic participation*", like citizen forums on local issues (Res29, CP3/4). The citizens are especially interested in promoting participation in rural areas and among specific populations, such as young people or minorities, who often have fewer incentives and get fewer opportunities to participate.

> F06: *"For me, democracy also means involving people, including those who are less vocal."* (Aud_CP2/1)

The CP members also refer to existing instruments of direct democracy and call for them to be used more frequently:

> M06: "*We actually have very few referendums and plebiscites and things like that. And yes, I think that could be increased somehow; it is an instrument, after all*." (Aud_CP2/1)

> "*There are plenty of opportunities also through referendums and so on. There are actually enough opportunities to get involved if you are committed*." (Int_M10)

Reducing bubbles and the "ideological divide" in society

Participants agree that democracy needs dialogue and exchange with a variety of people with different backgrounds and opinions, but that the developments in media and society have led to people retreating to and moving in their own ideological "bubbles", helped by the algorithmic nature of digital platforms and the increased emergence of ideologically biased "alternative media":

> M03: "*How can right-wing conservative citizens be brought into the mainstream media instead of them isolating themselves in their alternative media?"* (Obs2_CP3)

> F02: "*I also don't inform myself in a diverse way, but rather through my ideologies and values*." (Obs2_CP4)

At the same time, the participants caution against diagnosing an "ideological divide" when simply referring to differences of opinion. The participants believe that encouraging citizens to engage in dialogue and personal exchange with people at a local level – similar to their own experience in the Citizens' Parliament – can strengthen social cohesion and a *"de-bubbling*" of society (Res32). The citizens thus call on municipalities to create such spaces for dialogue. To reach a diversity of people that would not come on their own initiative, the participants suggest using a lottery principle such as is often used for citizens' assemblies.

> M05: "*Diversity can only be ensured by drawing lots."* (Obs1_CP4)

> M05: *"Create lottery systems in local municipalities. People who are not usually actively involved also get a chance. This would lead to greater diversity."* (Obs1_CP4)

The rights and limits of freedom of speech

When discussing freedom of speech as a fundamental element of democracy, CP members emphasise the importance of protecting and fighting for it, as well as setting limits against giving antidemocratic voices a stage, particularly in public service or mainstream media:

> M03: "*For me, democracy is above all about the fact that there are different opinions and that there should be different opinions. Democracy is actually strengthened by the fact that there are different opinions and that people can exchange them without fear of condemnation or disadvantages of any kind*." (Aud_CP2/1)

> F07: "*Some people cannot be talked to or included e.g., invited to appear on ORF (public service broadcast), because they do not adhere to basic social rules. This is not a basis for a democratic society.*" (Obs2_CP3)

To protect freedom of speech and expression, the CP members call for "*the promotion of discussion and debating clubs in schools and in adult education with the aim of recognising diversity of opinion as an opportunity*" (Res31, CP3/2).

Media education as a prerequisite for participation

CP members see participation in society as dependent on citizens being able to engage critically with the media and therefore see media education and the training of critical media literacy as central in democratic societies. According to the citizens, media education should foster critical

thinking, enable citizens to recognize "trustworthy" media and to be able to distinguish journalistic content and factual information from "fake news".

> "*Given that the media plays such an important role in democracy today, it is also necessary to have the necessary knowledge about the media and this role*." (Comm_Res35)

> *"You have to be aware about the information, where it comes from, and who is the original source of this information."* (Int_M10)

> *"One should learn early on to read or study media from at least two different perspectives, namely from two ideological or party-political ones."* (Int_M10)

The CP members developed several resolutions demanding media literacy training across the whole spectrum of society: from children and young people in and outside school who belong to the "digital generation" and need to be taught "*about high-quality media consumption"* (Min_CP3); to adults, including parents. As the citizens see parents as having a responsibility in ensuring media literacy in their children, a special emphasis is put on supporting parents with a migrant background through the creation of more *"low-threshold media literacy programs in different languages"* (Res37, CP3/3), to better enable them to support their children in turn:

> *"I am very satisfied with some of (the resolutions), e.g. that there should be special media literacy education programs for women with a migration background (mothers). I am convinced that this proposal could improve a lot in practice*" (Sur_CP3)

SRQ2c: Constructions of media in the Citizens' Parliament

Media – and media's roles in democracy – were the main object of the citizens' discussions throughout the Citizens' Parliament. While they seldom talked about their own definitions about what media are, the political struggles and threats around media in democratic society were addressed through deliberating on recommendations for the future perspectives. Six main themes of discursive constructions of media emerged.

Shifting trust in different media

What are media? Do they include "social media" platforms? CP members debated what could be identified as media and what could not. Overall, the participants acknowledged that it has become difficult to make a clear distinction between different types of media, as the previous main lines of distinction between sender and receiver, private and public, commercial and non-commercial are blurring. A generational variable appeared to be one of the major divisive factors among the way CP members perceive media and the participants also linked the generational shift in understanding of what media are to with the erosion of trust in different media:

> "*The media 'up there' in quotation marks or public broadcasting very often is simply associated with "the media" and it is likely to be perceived as something negative*." (Int_M05)

> *"The range of media consumption and also of participation in the media was, of course, extreme. A very young lad who perhaps isn't studying and is perhaps just a labourer will see things very differently from, say, an older person who has three degrees and grew up with it and is used to watching the news every day and reading 30 newspapers every day*." (Int_M05)

> "*I've noticed that older participants often use buzzwords like 'the internet' or 'TikTok' because they have little or no access to these things themselves and perceive a kind of extreme acceleration. And then they perhaps make the issue seem bigger than it is."* (Int_M01)

> *"The two young women (...), for them the regulation of digital platforms was very important (...) I think this plays a much bigger role for them than other media. I am more at home with analogue media and therefore haven't devoted as much energy to this regulation, but the two of them have, so I took a back seat."* (Int_F09)

The emergence of digital platforms and the recognition that "*depending on its reach, every account can be its own medium*" (Obs1_CP3) raises questions about what journalism is. The participants debated on definitions of journalism and whether it is dependent on earning a living from that profession, the amount of time dedicated to publishing, or a qualification acquired through training:

> F07: *"A new definition of journalism? The job description of 'professional' journalists is no longer as relevant."* (Obs2_CP3)

> M04: "*The problem is online media; anyone can claim to be a journalist. Journalists should have basic training."* (Obs1_CP3)

Regardless of their more or less restrictive definition of what constitutes the media, CP members agree that media – including accounts on digital platforms that have a comparable reach to more traditional media – should be held accountable and adhere to basic quality standards:

> M07: "*Threshold limit for accounts that become media-effective – must also meet quality criteria."* (Obs2_CP3)

Apart from the generational shift in the perception of different media, the participants identified the erosion of trust in media with their failure in making a wide audience feel represented in and by them. Participants express their need for better representation and for more participation:

> M01: *"Loss of trust arises from insufficient representation."* (Obs1_CP4)

> M03: *"Feeling seen and represented in the media is important."* (Obs1_CP4)

Media diversity and pluralism

The CP members recognise that a diversity of media is needed to meet the democratic needs of citizens, including all three media sectors: public service media, private commercial media and non-commercial community media. There is wide agreement that public service broadcasting in general, and the Austrian public service broadcaster ORF in particular has an integrative role to play for the public as a political community. The citizens address several resolutions to ORF, pushing the broadcaster to fulfil its public service mandate and really cater to the Austrian public at large, for example being more inclusive in terms of accessibility of the language used, and developing the spectrum of its channels:

> M04: "*Suitable language. ORF wants to reach as many people as possible*." (Obs1_CP3)

> "*Expansion of ORF's specialized channels to promote diversity, especially on social media*" (Min_CP4)

At the same time, they underline that non-commercial community media (also called "free media" in German) cover what mainstream media – and in some respects also the public service broadcaster – fail to tackle, by better catering to the democratic needs of small communities for (self-)representation and participation:

> *F08: "How can we get ORF to do this? Does (the community radio) Radio Orange do that?" (Obs2_CP4)*

> F07: *"Free media deal with small communities that are not covered in the mainstream."* (Obs2_CP1),

Media as the fourth estate

Participants agree that „*democracy is only possible with free media*" (Obs2_CP4) and declare that they have become more aware of the importance of the media as the "fourth estate". At the same time, they recognise challenges faced by media and journalists that impact them in their ability to fulfil this role: the developments of online spaces where potentially everyone can make their own media, their own financial pressures and interests, but also excessive state influence.

> F06: "*Jobs (in journalism) are suppressed but the same quality standards are expected."* (Obs1_CP3)

> "*I have the feeling that politicians' decisions are too much guided by their political interests. Above all, from the motive of being re-elected, perhaps also from the propagation of party-political points of view. This does not lead to the goal of an independent media landscape."* (Comm_Res12)

Media regulation by the state was one of the most hotly debated issues in the Austrian CP. The citizens CP members tended to agree that „*politics should have no direct impact on media*" (Obs1_CP1), but they had different views on how to find "*a good balance between regulation and censorship*" (Obs2_CP2). They particularly criticised a perceived biased reporting in media with close ties to local politics in municipalities:

> "*We call for factual reporting on political topics at municipal level (e.g. on municipal council meetings) in media that are produced or commissioned by the municipality (e.g. on social media platforms, in podcasts, etc.)."* (Res30, CP3/4)

Media regulation and media funding

More transparency and the application of quality criteria in media funding, especially concerning state subsidies, are key demands of the Austrian CP members. The citizens criticise the current practice of the Austrian government to mainly fund public media (especially newspapers) through advertisements and instead call for applying clear standards and communicating these transparently in publicly accessible accountability reports:

> *"Currently, public authorities spend many times more on advertising than they do on funding quality journalism. This ratio needs to be reversed."* (Comm_Res05)

> M02: *"Reverse the current relationship between media funding and advertisement: 80% public funding, 20% advertising funding*." (Obs1_CP1)

> *"For more transparency in the allocation of funding, we call for the compilation of publicly accessible accountability reports on media funding, covering the application of award criteria, the funding amounts and those responsible for the decisions." (Res14, CP4/4)*

Most media funding decisions in Austria are currently being made by the Austrian Regulatory Authority for Broadcasting and Telecommunications, RTR GmbH, which is not politically independent, as it is under the authority of the Austrian Federal Chancellery. As they fear political interference, the CP members thus call for shifting the mandate for allocating fundings to the independent media authority KommAustria (Res11, CP2/2) and to delegate funding decisions to independent expert advisory boards with specialist expertise and representativeness:

> *"The relevance, as well as the quality itself, should be examined publicly and transparently by experts and consumers of all age groups*." (Comm_Res45)

> *"The composition of funding advisory boards should be politically independent and professionally competent, and should take into account representation with regard to diversity characteristics, in particular age, gender, sexual orientation, origin, religion, etc."* (Res13, CP4/4)

Economic interests vs. journalistic standards

The citizens perceive the commercial interests driving media development as separate from the interests of citizens and journalistic standards. Private media corporations are seen as businesses that are driven mainly by commercial pressures and interests, which are at odds with the journalistic standards that should guide quality media:

> "*Profit-oriented logic is a problem because profit is generated through headlines."* (Obs1_CP2)

While the Austrian Press Council is looked on by many of the CP members as an institution that has clear definitions of journalistic standards and can offer procedures for monitoring their compliance, other participants question the impartiality of the Press Council as a self-regulatory body and regard its self-regulatory power as hampered by membership being voluntary:

> "*Representatives of private media corporations sit on the Press Council (not particularly democratic)."* (Vet_Res7)

Austrian CP members pay special attention to 'tabloid' media outlets with extensive coverage and low professional standards (some of which are distributed for free), as they benefit from public financing in the form of advertising. They wish to counter this, as they believe that the sensationalist reporting of these outlets has negative consequences for democracy:

> *"The majority was certainly against so-called tabloid media (…). There was also a certain consensus that that should be reduced."* (Int_M10)

> *"The two free newspapers in Austria belong to large media houses. New media should be promoted."* (Obs1_CP2)

> *"Free newspapers or their promotion by public money and space should be discontinued."* (Obs1_CP1)

The citizens also debated whether large media corporations and digital platforms with commercial interests should be taxed on the EU level. The resolution on this was adopted, but it received two vetoes that question the demand for its potential restriction of media freedom:

> "*We call for quality-based taxation of large media, including digital platforms, by the EU."* (Res47, CP2/3)

> "*No, I'm against it. I'm in favour of promoting media that deliver high-quality journalism*." (Comm_Res47)

The challenging environment of digital platforms

CP members estimate that digital platforms nourish hate speech and propagate fake news, and therefore, should be regulated. The propensity of algorithms to segregate people into bubbles was the most debated issue. Recognising that the regulation of international platforms requires an international response, they directed most of their regulatory requests to the EU.

> "*Digital platforms are currently unregulated or only minimally regulated. Given their vast reach, it is essential for the sake of democratic integrity to minimize hate speech and inflammatory messages."* (Comm_Res49)

The CP members are appealing for a 'European path' to be paved, by creating European digital platforms, regulating existing ones at EU level and developing media systems that reflect certain quality criteria and "European values", although the exact definition of those quality criteria and values was contentious.

> F09: "*Is it conceivable to establish digital platforms in Europe that are public-service oriented?*" (Obs2_CP1)

> F07: "*How can the EU offer alternatives to "tech bro" platforms?*" (Obs2_CP2)

> *"How can a European media system be established that reflects European (media) values?"* (Min_CP2)

Apart from their propensity for disinformation, "filter bubbles" and hate speech, the developments of digital platforms are also talked about as challenging for their information structures, which are increasingly based on "small bites of information", which might lead to a shorter attention span, especially in younger generations. For these reasons, the citizens of the Austrian CP are advocating for restricting access to platforms for users under the age of 14.

> M07: "*Attention spans of younger generations are decreasing due to 30-second videos on social media."* (Obs2_CP1)

> *"Because you can simply see that without regulation, it's no longer manageable, and eventually it becomes unwatchable. Looking at young people, many of them see that it's all terrible when they consume TikTok and similar platforms, and everything else, without regard for the consequences*." (Int_M05)

4.5 Short concluding reflection

The Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy in Austria could build on existing experience with citizen councils in the national context. Especially in the federal state of Vorarlberg and in Vienna, citizen councils are an established element in policy development on a local and regional level. One of our CP-members had been taking part in the citizen council on climate policy before his participation in our CP. [8]

The call to take part at the Citizens' Parliament came at a time when the conservative People's Party and the far-right Freedom Party were negotiating to form a government. There were fears that a right-wing government would restrict media freedom in line with its own agenda and that some independent media outlets might even be threatened with extinction. Questions about safeguarding democracy and the role of the media were therefore central to many citizens, and there was accordingly a great deal of interest in participating in the Citizens' Parliament.

Even when the plans of the right-wing coalition failed, the issue of media and democracy remained high on the public agenda. The Austrian media landscape has long been characterized by a high degree of media concentration, and the allocation of public advertising and subsidies is regularly criticized in reports such as the Media Pluralism Monitor for Austria (Seethaler, Beaufort & Strobl, 2025, the Rule of Law Report (European Commission, 2025), and most recently by the Austrian Court of Auditors (Rechnungshof Österreich, 2025).

Against this backdrop, there was considerable interest in the participation and work of the Citizens' Parliament, which was supported by, among others, the City of Vienna, as European Capital of Democracy 2025, the media authority RTR, and the Austrian Adult Education Centres. As Austria is a country with a very restrictive citizenship law excluding over 20% of the people living in the country from local, regional and national elections, the citizen parliament was a good example for enabling a much more inclusive and adequate form of participation.

In their deliberations on the role of the media for strengthening democracy the 20 participating citizens developed and adopted 50 resolutions. They repeatedly emphasised the importance of the expert inputs and the opportunities for exchange with experts from the media and research as part of their participation. They placed a clear focus on the need of strengthening journalistic quality and on the need for more transparency in media financing and ownership structures. Regarding digital platforms, the issue of insufficient regulation and their responsibility for promoting opinion bubbles, facilitated by their business models, was addressed. Another focus of the deliberation concerned participation and representation in the media. Here, the role of the public service broadcaster and non-commercial community media was particularly emphasised. The role of civil society as an important element in democracy and as a platform for social participation was also emphasised here.

The teaching of media literacy was a recurring theme that was discussed in relation to both expectations of the media and educational institutions. This reflects the situation that media literacy is discussed in public debates as a key skill for strengthening democratic participation, but that there is no national strategy for it.

[8] https://klimarat.org/

For the participants, the process not only made democratic participation tangible, but also opened up access to social learning. Even on topics where divergent positions were represented, constructive dialogue was not only possible but was also perceived as enriching and motivating. The participants had set up their own rules for voting on resolutions and dealing with contradictions and they managed well to follow them for the whole process. Getting to know different points of view and perspectives could thus be experienced as enriching the democratic debate. This collective experience strengthened confidence in participation and deliberation as a suitable way of making decisions. In the end, all participants agreed that the learning and discussion process would have needed more time and that motivation to participate had increased over the four meeting-days. What remained open at the end was the question of the extent to which political decision-makers or media representatives are willing to engage with the resolutions that were developed and continue the discussion with citizens.

5 Ireland

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This report presents some of the findings from the MeDeMAP research project that planned and delivered the National Citizens' Parliament of Ireland on Media and Democracy. It details the preparation for and operation of the parliament over four days in Spring 2025. It provides the outcomes of the citizens' work – 22 resolutions (see Appendix A.3). It describes and analyses how the citizens envisioned the democratic roles of media in their resolutions and in the process leading to their formulation. It offers a description and discussion of how democracy and media were constructed in the participatory process of the citizens' parliament itself.

5.1 Organisational report

The methodology that is described below was devised collectively by the research partners in the MeDeMAP project (Monnot et al, 2025). It was adapted to the Irish context and was reviewed and adapted where necessary throughout the research period (Glaser and Strauss, 1967/1995).

Timeframe

The National Citizens' Parliament of Ireland took place in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, in the centre of Limerick city over four Saturdays in Spring 2025.

The dates chosen were the 22nd of March 2025, the 5th of April 2025, the 26th of April 2025 and the 10th of May 2025. This provided time for citizens to reflect on what they had learned and discussed between parliaments. Each session started at 10 am and finished at 4 pm, with a one-hour break for lunch from 1 pm to 2 pm, although the citizens used this time to continue their discussions.

Participants

The participants were selected using a three-tiered approach to ensure that they represented as wide a range of diversity in the general population as possible.

The final selection provided a good representation of various sociodemographic groups and 20 people were invited to participate with a further five placed on a substitute list. It was determined and agreed at the planning stage that only those who attended on the first day should participate in the parliament as it was deemed important that the group should get to know and trust each other. The information and deliberation stages that began on the first day were crucial to the development of critical thinking and for collective reflection and decision making and so no new people were to be recruited if any participants had to pull out after the first day.

Twenty-one people turned up on Day 1, and no one was turned away. This number of 21 reduced through natural attrition to 20 on the second day and was down to 18 on the last day, Day 4.

The main categories that determined selection were gender, age, class, membership of a minority group, level of education, level of interest in politics and the news and whether the person was living in the city or in the countryside.

The most difficult age demographic to fill was the 40-50 age group, as many were working full-time with young families and could not commit to attending for four full Saturdays. The other age groups are well represented with the ages ranging from 22 to 80 years of age.

There were ten females, one person who identified as non-binary, and ten males. Nine are rural dwellers, one lives in both the city and the country, and eleven live in the city. Six people were educated to secondary school level, and six to third level. One person had completed primary school level only and had no academic certification.

All of the participants had participated in political elections by voting in the past five years. None of the citizens were members of a political party, movement or political organisation. Ten people had participated in a demonstration, protest or political activities, including online campaigns in the past twelve months. The range in levels of political interest was gauged by responses to questioning by the facilitator and in particular in response to the question of how long the person spent following political news and current affairs in the media. Eleven people spent 10 – 30 minutes reading or watching political news. Seven people spent on average 30 minutes to 1 hour engaging with political news on a typical day. Three people spent more than an hour on average reading or watching political news on a typical day.

There was a broad representation of members of various minority groups including persons not born in Ireland; people of diverse ethnic backgrounds and people with a variety of physical disabilities and sexual orientations with a high degree of intersectionality observed.

Nine citizens self-identified as middle class, one person identified as middle to upper class and eleven people self-identified as coming from a working-class background.

Location

Limerick City was selected as the single location for a number of reasons. The majority of large research projects focus on Dublin City, as it is the capital city, whereas Limerick offered the people of the southwest of Ireland the opportunity to participate and to have a voice.

Limerick has a large population, with 209,536 people living in the greater city area (CSO, 2023). This enabled the recruitment of participants who were broadly representative of the country's population.

Mary Immaculate College (MIC) was chosen as the venue because it is a short walk from the city centre. It is readily accessible by public transport, being a short distance from the train station and because it is on the bus route from many suburban areas. Car parking was available, free of charge, to participants and was easy to organise.

MIC was also chosen for the excellence of the support structures – catering, technical and the quality of the rooms provided. The rooms had the capacity to comfortably host the twenty participants, the research team and invited guests without overcrowding or congestion. The main room that was used accommodated the placement of twenty-two seats in a circle, with four tables placed at each corner of the room. It also had space for a large catering table where,

tea, coffee, water fruit and cakes were made available throughout the day. The second room was the College's board room, and this accommodated the formal sessions of the parliament itself when citizens were voting on resolutions. This change of room for the voting stage helped to bring an official air to the proceedings, and this was appreciated and commented on by many of the participants. Both rooms were equipped with computers, screens, microphones and speakers. Both rooms were supported by a technician.

Moderators/Facilitators

The Irish team consisted of a co-ordinator, Dr Rosemary Day; two facilitators, Jude McInerney and Kathy Cush and two observers, Jayde Ryan and Adam Bowe. The co-ordinator is the lead researcher/partner for Ireland in the MeDeMAP project. Both facilitators were recruited because they had previous experience of facilitating groups and because each has a Masters of Arts in Media and Communication Studies. One facilitator is the Research Assistant on the project and the other is Teaching Fellow in MIC. Both observers were chosen because they have a BA in Media and Communication Studies and were available for training and for each of the four Saturdays.

Training was provided for the observers by Dr Vaia Doudaki of Charles University in Prague and this helped the observers to understand their distinct roles in the research project i.e. one ethnographic observer and one observer for how the content and discussion of content was progressed on each day. Their individual reports contributed valuable, additional data for this country report.

Training in The Art of Hosting was provided by Ruth Picker and organised by COMMIT in Vienna in November 2024. All three organisers of the Irish National Parliament attended this training and found it very beneficial.

Experts / Training

The first part of each day was an information or learning phase. The citizens were offered a variety of learning opportunities including face-to-face presentations; panel discussions; videos and online research. Over the course of the four days, the Irish National Citizens' Parliament met with eleven experts in person, all of whom were carefully chosen by the Irish team to explain the topics of democracy, media systems, representation and participation. They all provided accurate, relevant information in an accessible format and the citizens had the opportunity to question the experts and to discuss the topics in detail.

The experts were a mix of academics and non-academics so that citizens could hear both theoretical perspectives and the real experiences of those who work in the media or are affected by the issues explored. There were three media academics and one political studies expert; there was one regulator and one of the academics was a former regulator in the United Kingdom and also in Ireland; there were editors and journalists from the local media and activists who represented minority and under-represented groups in society. The mix of these two types of experts greatly enhanced the learning and understanding of the citizens. It was interesting to note that the citizens engaged with both types of experts in more or less the same way. They found it easy to ask questions of people with whom they sat in a circle. The face-to-face interaction with people who spoke simply and clearly and who were passionate

about their area of interest really enhanced their understanding and deepened their curiosity. So much so, that the citizens complained after each information session that they would have liked more time with the experts.

A timeframe for preparation was agreed, and the research methodology, draft script for the day they were to deliver and a link to the videos prepared by partners were shared with the academic experts. The project co-ordinator met with each prospective expert in advance, online and talked through their intended contributions. In most cases, academics sent PowerPoint slides in advance to check if these would be comprehensive enough and if they would be of benefit to the parliamentarians. In the case of non-academic experts, the co-ordinator spoke with each one in advance, sharing the aim of the panel discussion, along with information about the other panellists, the videos prepared by partners and discussing their intended contributions.

It was decided to invite non-academic experts, people who were active in the area of work or of consideration as panel members i.e. editors and journalists on Day 2 and community activists representing different minority groups and interests on Days 3 and 4. This was considered to be more accessible and relevant as citizens needed to know what was happening on the ground and it was anticipated that academic experts might be a little too theoretical to really engage with the citizens, although as mentioned above this was not the case. The academics spoke simply and were enthusiastically quizzed by the citizens. However, the inclusion of panels of journalists and of activists really excited the citizens and they invited them to join them for lunch on both days, which the guests did and the conversations and learning continued as a result.

On the fourth and final day, due to a request by the citizens who were particularly concerned about online regulation and about ways of making online media safe, our second speaker was an online expert who is the Assistant Director of Regulatory Policy, from Coimisiún na Meán, Ireland's media regulator. This adjustment of the information session worked well. The researchers and the citizens would have preferred to have the representative from the Regulator in the room, as the other guests had been, but as this was an unanticipated request from the citizens, we were lucky to be able to get any representative of Coimisiún na Meán (the Irish Regulator) at such short notice and on a weekend. As it happened, the representative was a gifted and highly engaging speaker with good, clear PowerPoint slides and the citizens understood why he was not able to be with them in the room, and they engaged with him very positively and actively.

The citizens also watched three different videos on the topics of media systems, representation and participation created by the MeDeMAP team of experts on Days 2, 3 and 4. These were created by some of the partners in the project, i.e. Prof Nico Carpentier (Charles University, Prague); Prof Beata Klimkiewicz (Jagellonian University, Krakow); Prof Jeffrey Wimmer (University of Augsburg and Charles University, Prague) and Prof Andrea Miconi (IULM, Milan).

The academic experts who met with the citizens and shared their expertise were Dr Fergal Quinn, UL, Limerick; Dr Roddy Flynn, DCU, Dublin; Dr Eileen Cullotty, DCU, Dublin. Other experts invited were Mr Denis Wolinski, OFCOM and the BAI; Mr Callum Fabb, Coimisiún na Meán; Dr Sindy Joyce, Representative of the Traveller ethnic minority; Dr Lylian Fotabong, representative of the African migrant community; Ms Áine Fitzgerald, Editor of the Limerick

Leader; Joe Nash, Managing Director and Presenter with Live 95; Allen Meagher, Editor of the community newspaper, Changing Ireland and Brian Greene, Chairperson of the Community Radio Forum of Ireland, Craol.

Script

Each country's team had agreed the broad shape and content of each day (Monnot et al, 2025). These scripts were the starting point for the planning and provided a useful template which each country then adapted.

The scripts for the four days in Ireland were created through a rigorous process of discussion and consultation by the research team. They were tailor-made, taking into account our objectives and resources, as well as the local context and they were reviewed after each session and adjusted taking the comments and feedback from the citizens into account. The scripts provided for three distinct phases in each day – Information phase, Deliberation phase and Resolution Phase.

Information Phase

The Irish team decided to use two different types of experts in the information stages each day. We started each day with an academic who was chosen because he or she was a good communicator and had a background in the theoretical area as well as some practical experience of the issue in practice in the real world. We chose experts who were able to explain the concepts and ideas that the citizens would need to understand in plain language, and we wanted to ensure that they would be able to connect in a meaningful way with the citizens. We then invited experts who were not academics, but who had daily experience of the issues under consideration so working journalists and editors on Day 1 and 2 and representatives of minority groups or activists on Days 3 and 4.

Deliberation Phase

The methodology recommended that the citizens were to be given every opportunity to speak. To facilitate this, we employed a mix of formats, alternating between small group and plenary discussions and activities. A script or running order was necessary to keep everything flowing within what turned out to be a tight time frame. We were able to be flexible in terms of adjusting the type of activity we employed depending on the progress made but we held to the planned timing of the script in order to move through the three phases required in the methodology i.e. information, deliberation, decision.

Resolution Phase

The final session planned for each day was the formal parliamentary session where citizens voted on the resolutions they had drafted earlier in the day. This changed (see section 5.4., SRQ2b below, under "Voting") when the citizens decided not to vote in a rush on Day 2 but agreed to come in early on Day 3 and hold two parliamentary sessions on that day.

To prepare for the parliaments, the team met several times in advance of the first day. In these meetings, the different aspects of facilitation were discussed. Roles were agreed upon and each person became aware of their responsibilities within the team and for each day. A running order/script was produced for each of the four days.

5.2 Analytical report

Data collection

This report is based on the data that was generated in the following ways:

- Observation and field notes.
- Recordings and transcriptions
- Field materials
- Questionnaires administered online
- PowerPoint presentations of experts
- 22 Resolutions and votes cast in parliament
- Exit interviews
- Review meetings of researchers

The data collected was transferred to written records and these informed the analysis that constructed the coding trees for the Irish Citizens' Parliament. These led in turn to the insights and reflections offered in the discussion of the findings with respect to Research Questions 1 and 2 in sections 5.3 and 5.4 of this report.

Observation and Field Notes

On each day, two trained observers took notes as events and discussions unfolded. The two observers and the two facilitators took part in two training sessions facilitated online by Dr Vaia Doudaki of Charles University to ensure that this was done correctly and was consistent across all four national parliaments.

The observation tasks were discrete and were alternated between the two observers each day. One observer took ethnographic notes, and these reports describe in detail how each activity was organised, how the citizens participated, and they detail who and how each person engaged or did not engage. The second observer took notes on the discussions of the issues raised by the experts at the start of each day and on the debates and deliberations of the citizens on these issues including the formulation or wording of resolutions.

The observers were introduced to the citizens at the start of the first day, and their roles were explained. The observers sat outside the circle during general discussions and took notes on their laptops. The observers then finalised their reports after each day and sent these to the project's research assistant who kept them in a secure location, i.e. encrypted on her laptop.

These reports were extremely useful as they are a record of how the citizens engaged with each other and with the topics presented to them for discussion and deliberation and they supplemented the recordings of discussions made and transcribed, see below.

Recordings and transcriptions

As agreed with the partners in planning meetings, recordings were made of general discussions. Three recording devices were used on each occasion – a mobile phone, a laptop and a Zoom recorder were available, but it was found that the use of mobile phones was the least intrusive. Citizens were warned each time the recording device was activated. By prior agreement with the partners, the information sessions of experts were not recorded.

Despite the agreement to only record general discussions, the mobile phones were placed on tables during breakout or small group activities from time to time. These proved useful at times when interpreting some notes and pictograms produced in these groups, but they were used as a backup and not transcribed, as they were not a primary method of data collection.

The recordings of the general discussions were transcribed using Microsoft's transcription tool and were checked by the researcher several times for accuracy. The names of all participants were anonymised and all potential identifiers were removed from the transcripts.

Field materials

Several of the activities involved note-taking, the use of flip charts, large sheets of paper and sometimes cut-out pieces of cardboard. These enabled discussion and brainstorming. They were enjoyed by the participants who could see the value of working in these more alternative ways. The materials were collected by the researchers at the end of each day. They were subsequently photographed and filed on the main researcher's computer and were available for use in the analysis and in some of the dissemination activities subsequently. Only those participants who had signed a consent form to allow their photographs to be used were photographed. It had been agreed by the partners during the research methodology planning stage that participants' identities would be protected. Consequently, anonymity was guaranteed in the information sheets distributed prior to the first day. When it became clear that photographs would be useful for dissemination purposes, some participants were happy to be in them and they signed a new consent form specifically granting permission for their images to be captured and used, but most did not, and this made the collection of visual materials difficult.

Questionnaires administered online

These questionnaires were devised collectively and administered centrally by Charles University in Prague. They are an excellent way of gathering information where people are digitally literate. Unfortunately, the older members of the group were not very active on digital platforms, and there were fewer responses than anticipated. None of the citizens availed of the opportunity to fill in the questionnaires on paper and this may have had more to do with the timescale of the delivery of the questionnaires, i.e. one week after each parliament, than with the questionnaire itself.

PowerPoint presentations of experts

Eleven experts came to share information with the citizens. Four academics provided PowerPoint presentations and two did not. One expert from Ireland's Regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, provided a PowerPoint presentation. Three media practitioners and two community activists participated in panel discussions and did not provide any PowerPoint presentations. The observers' notes detail the content delivered and the discussions/Q&A sessions.

Resolutions and votes cast in parliaments

Twenty-two resolutions were formulated during the deliberation phase, and these were displayed on a large screen as citizens entered the room set aside for the parliament. This meant that everyone knew what was being put before them for discussion and decision. The citizens voted on each in turn, by secret ballot, as requested by them originally. A record of the wording

was kept and the votes cast, "for", "against" and "abstention", and these were kept on the researchers' laptops. These have been recorded and are presented in a PDF and a booklet (see Appendix A.3). These resolutions are the final iteration of the parliamentarians after extensive deliberation but the drafts that they formulated along with the recordings of their discussions (see above), were made and transcribed, along with the ethnographic field notes (see above) also provided insights into both research questions in terms of understanding of how decisions were arrived at both procedurally and content wise.

Exit interviews

Five interviews were conducted with a selection of participants after the last parliament concluded. Participants were chosen to be representative of the diversity of the parliament. Particular care was taken to ensure that there was a balance between those who had been most vocal and those who were less so. These were transcribed and added a different and useful dimension to the other tools in particular in providing additional insights to those gathered by the ethnographic observer each day (See above).

Review meetings of researchers

The co-ordinator and the two facilitators met each week after each parliament and reviewed the organisation and execution of each day. This facilitated future planning for the day-long sessions, and the collective reflection by the researchers informed the analysis of the data here.

Taken together these documents provide a rich source of data for analysis and for reflection. The analysis was conducted in the first instance by developing a set of coding trees. After two training sessions online with the research co-ordinator from OEAW, Andreas Martin, Jude McInerney produced the coding trees that inform the discussion of the main research questions below. These were refined pending collective discussion in online meetings with all partners engaged in this process and on advice from the research co-ordinator.

Sensitising concepts employed in the coding process

The sensitising concepts used to code the generated data pile emerged from the shared methodological framework arrived at by the partners conducting citizen parliaments over several meetings, both in person and online. The Irish team did not use software for this analysis and worked manually to prepare and construct their coding trees. An inductive approach was employed whereby the transcripts and notes were read several times with an open mind and the codes emerged more clearly on each subsequent reading.

The sensitising concepts that enabled the compilation of the components of each tree were informed by the theoretical underpinnings of the entire project, specifically from Carpentier and Wimmer' Democracy and Media in Europe: A Discursive-Material Approach (2025). Understandings of the different forms of democracy and of the democratic roles the media can perform were particularly useful in informing the analysis of the first research question and its discussion on how the citizens perceived the role and responsibilities of the media in promoting and supporting democracy. Likewise, Carpentier and Wimmer's theoretical framework was useful in determining the type of participation experienced by the citizens over the course of the four days, in particular whether this was maximalist or minimalist.

The sensitising concepts were tied closely to the main themes discussed over the four days that had been previously agreed by all partners i.e. democracy, media systems, representation and participation. The researcher was conscious of working from the data first to build the coding trees, using grounded theory as a guiding principle (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1995) so that the voices of the participants in the Citizens' Parliament were heard both collectively and individually.

These sensitising concepts guided the second and third readings and each reading provided more topics and insights. These had to be refined and grouped together for clarity and brevity.

A draft of the coding trees was prepared on the third reading and presented to the research co-ordinator (Andreas Martin, OEAW). On receipt of his advice and on foot of discussions on-line with the other partners who were working on their own coding trees over the summer of 2025, these coding trees were honed and refined leading to the identification of the elements that inform the analysis presented below.

The development of the coding trees was challenging, in particular the need to develop categories that attempted to capture several nuances under simple headings. The process was time consuming and sometimes confusing as it required several close readings of the data generated during the Citizens' Parliament. However, each reading led to further refinement and clarity and supplies the insights and understandings shared below.

The analytical process in and across research teams

The Irish team met with the other partners for training and to compare and contrast our progress online on three occasions over the Summer of 2025 under the guidance of the research co-ordinator, Andreas Martin (OEAW).

Working in conjunction with the other three teams from Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovenia helped us to refine our analysis and to understand the common approach to coding that the partners were to take. Seeing how researchers were forming their coding trees and discussing the difficulties they were encountering made the process far easier and gave us confidence that we were working in the right way. It was most helpful to see the actual shape of the coding trees required when this was shared in online meetings. Data analysis, especially of a large amount of material, can be isolating, so discussing common problems and learning from each other was a really good way to ensure that we were on track.

It was helpful to see similar themes and clusters of ideas emerge in the coding trees of the other countries. This may have been due in part to the nature of the planning and execution of the research – all partners had agreed to a common plan, we had agreed the main themes and the days on which they would be discussed, and these emerged as the main themes in the data but it was encouraging to find that each of our partners was working in a similar manner and uncovering broadly similar findings.

5.3 Findings and analysis: Research question 1

Research question 1: How do the citizen parliament participants envision the democratic roles of media in their recommendations / resolutions for future perspectives and in the processes leading to these recommendations?

Secondary Research Questions:

a) What articulations of the media's democratic roles did the participants in the CP prioritise, which were omitted and which received only limited attention?
b) Which recommendations on future perspectives received consensus within the CP? Which future perspectives were the object of political struggle, and which ideological perspectives structured these differences?
c) How balanced were the power relations that characterized the process of producing the recommendations of the CP? How was conflict handled during the process? How was collaboration achieved during the process?

Overview: Envisioning the democratic roles of the media

The Irish citizens envisioned the democratic roles of the media in their recommendations for the future in a number of ways. They proposed 22 separate resolutions under three headings – media systems, representation and participation and these are presented in Appendix A.3. These provide the final iteration of their deliberations, engagement and experiences but their understanding of the democratic role of the media was arrived at over time and collectively through discussion and debate. This section describes those deliberations and the citizens' participation in the process. It analyses how these two elements, the discursive and the experiential, built the shared understanding and vision for the citizens' expectations for media to play a role in democracy.

The categories employed emerged from the construction of the coding trees and were informed by the theoretical conceptualisation for the research project and devised by Carpentier and Wimmer in their recent book (2025).

Analysis of the data, in particular of the coding exercise, revealed that the Irish citizens understood the democratic roles of the media in broadly similar ways to the five democratic roles of the media identified by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025). These are:

- providing information
- acting as a watchdog
- facilitating a forum for debate
- promoting representation of diverse sectors of society in the media and
- facilitating participation in the media and in the democratic system.

They are discussed in detail in section 5.3, SRQ1a. Three priorities for the citizens are noted here:

1. The citizens prioritised protection for the media and for the public in their proposals. While these concentrated on regulation and on the protection of people when on digital platforms, particularly when engaging with and on social media, they also proposed some platform-wide measures to ensure protection.

2. One of the more traditional suggestions of the provision of a "town hall" type of forum was strengthened by the insistence that these be organised by media stakeholders, specifically by the regulator and the union of journalists. This illustrates an understanding by the citizens of the importance of the role of the media in two important ways. First as the "fourth estate" in holding those in power to account by the public i.e. as watchdog. Second in ensuring that this happens openly and transparently, in public and in following up on commitments made to see if they have been implemented. This is an example of the media facilitating the public sphere and it shows that the citizens understood that the media should act as a forum. They see the media as a space that facilitates debate, one that brings people and their representatives together, one where the media play the role of facilitating a forum for democratic dialogue.

3. The members of the Irish Parliament were particularly keen on education as a way of supporting individuals' agency as members of a democracy, as consumers of the media and as participants in both. One of the most popular suggestions that they had as a group was the provision of media literacy programmes and campaigns across platforms and for people of all ages and intellectual abilities. They identified a role for the media in promoting and protecting democracy through an educational function that may be categorized as Media Literacy. They expanded this to include education to improve citizens' understanding of the democratic system and education to facilitate their representation and participation in both media and democracy. Their desire for media to engage in such education is discussed here under the participatory role the media can facilitate. It was such a strong and recurring theme in the deliberations and resolutions of the Irish parliament that it is highlighted here as a distinct and strongly felt need identified by the participants, one they believe media should address to assist them in negotiating the media and in maximizing their agency in engaging in active and inclusive citizenship.

SRQ1a: Articulations of the media's democratic roles prioritised by the participants in the Irish Citizens' Parliament

The citizens prioritised the representational and participatory roles of the media in promoting and defending democracy, but this may be due, in part, to the fact that two of the four days proposed these specifically as the main topics for discussion and deliberation. All five democratic roles as identified by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025) were considered important, but the informational and watchdog roles were taken almost as a given or a norm and were not hotly debated as a result. The citizens saw a difference between traditional, legacy media and digital, in particular social media in this regard. They believed that traditional media were well regulated and that this meant that they were provided with information that was generally factual, objective and impartial but that social media was far less trustworthy. None of the roles identified by Carpentier and Wimmer were ignored.

The democratic role of the media in the provision of information

Irish citizens believe that media play an important role in providing information. They believe that people need accurate, relevant and objective information to be able to fully function in society. They understand this as a traditional function of the media, and they specifically mentioned the need for unbiased reporting. They did not believe that the media always provide this, however, and one of their resolutions asks the Regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, to specifically address this issue. It proposes that

> *"The Oireachtas (Ireland's Parliament) should review legislation to allow Coimisún na Meán to conduct more regular media reports, ensuring balance in the positive, negative and accurate reporting of media outlets"* (Resolution 2, Representation).

The citizens believed that the media have an ethical responsibility to challenge fake news. They realized that they are dependent on the media to provide them with truthful and objective reporting and they stressed the need for the media to engage in more investigative journalism. They placed responsibility on journalists and on media owners to return to redress old reports where these may have been proven subsequently to be inaccurate. For example, they formulated and passed a resolution that proposes that

> *"The NUJ and media owners should facilitate journalists in revising historical inaccuracies and/or controversial reports"* (Resolution 2, Representation)

This resolution was formulated after a discussion based on information shared by one of the representatives of a minority ethnic groups invited in to talk to the citizens about representation. The members of parliament took her example of an unfair and inaccurate report of her community in the national press and proposed measures for redressing unfair representation of minorities and others in historic or controversial reports.

While this resolution illustrates the citizens regard for the necessity of trust and accuracy, it also recognizes that journalism is not an exact science. It shows that citizens understand that mistakes can be made by journalists and that contexts and understandings of situations, representations and stereotypes may change over time and should be revisited in the spirit of fairness and justice.

Although the citizens tasked news providers with ensuring that they were truthful, accurate and impartial they also looked to the state to monitor and enforce compliance with these standards. They requested the government to resource the Regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, to police the media essentially, proposing that

> *"The Oireachtas (Irish houses of parliament) should review legislation to allow Coimisiún na Meán to conduct more regular media reports, ensuring balance in the positive, negative and accurate reporting of media outlets"* (Resolution 1, Representation)

However, citizens were worried that financial pressures on newsrooms and on journalists now meant that the quality of information (truth, objectivity, impartiality etc.) is being compromised. One citizen put it clearly when he said, "money is what makes a lot of media go around" (Male 7). Another agreed, lamenting the decline of "good journalism" due to financial pressures, saying

> *"I think people would be very positive about them (media), but they would be concerned that they're limited in their ability to put out good-quality media now because of the financial restrictions, particularly since they would like a more open media. … So, I think people are perhaps beginning to focus on that type of medium now rather than the day-to-day news, which is very much repetitive and doesn't have any real bite."* (Male 2)

The democratic role of the media as watchdog

Irish citizens were clear that the media must be their eyes and ears. They recognized that they did not have the time or the capacity to judge the quality of the information they receive and

they wanted the media to act ethically and to provide unbiased reporting. They discussed the need for the media to challenge fake news and to fact check on their behalf.

They wanted the media to keep politicians and others on their toes and discussed the need for accountability. This is noted by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025) as one of the ways in which the media can question and challenge the hegemonic order. The citizens were particularly concerned about the decline in investigative journalism in the Irish media in recent years. They believed that journalists needed time to go deeper into the background of stories but that they were under resourced and under too much pressure in trying to keep up with the immediacy demanded by digital platforms to adequately research stories. They formulated several resolutions that sought to resource newsrooms and to retain journalists. Specifically, they proposed that

> *"A universal basic wage for journalists should be provided, which will offer a level of financial protection".* (Resolution 2, Media Systems)

There was no sense of unease or concern that this might in any way affect the autonomy or freedom of expression of journalists, but the resolution itself is not clear with regards to who should provide this level of pay. The citizens left this in the air. It may be that they intended it to be like the living wage whereby a minimum amount of pay per hour is set in law and employers must provide this rather than it being centrally provided by government, but it was not made clear.

Media's democratic role in the provision of a forum

The Irish citizens were keen to be more involved in the democratic process and believed that the media were ideally placed to facilitate this. They wanted the media, particularly their local and regional media to hold their politicians publicly to account and to do this publicly in a forum that would be both physical and online. They wanted the media to report on these, but they wanted them to be pro-active in posing the questions on their behalf, so they saw the media as allies in holding the politicians to account. Their resolution proposes that

> *"Media stakeholders (the NUJ, Coimisiún na Meán) should facilitate quarterly regional forums with the public. Stakeholders could then bring the issues raised to elected officials in a public forum, allowing for questioning of/discussion with elected officials on community/national issues and resolutions."* (Resolution 1, Participation)

The citizens believed that it was crucial that there be a designated role for media bodies to organise and hold these "town hall" type of engagements. They were happy for these to take place in person, online, or to be facilitated as hybrid meetings, but they were very clear on the need for simple, direct channels of communication to be provided so that stakeholders, be they individuals or groups, could bring their issues to their elected representatives efficiently and transparently. While this clearly shows an acceptance of representative democracy as the legitimate form of government, it moves closer towards participative democracy in attempting to bring the electorate and the elected together in a single forum.

By calling for these opportunities for public debate to be facilitated by the Regulator and by journalists, the resolution recognises the role of the media as a facilitator of the public sphere. Citizens were concerned that such opportunities for engagement should have real impact. They

believed that by insisting on the involvement of media practitioners and the Regulator in facilitating the fora, politicians would be held publicly to account and would have to act on the expressed concerns and issues of members of the Irish public.

The citizens also recognised the need for these fora to be facilitated regularly, i.e. four times a year so that politicians could be held to account and in this respect the resolution also shows evidence of their understanding of the watchdog role of the media. The call for these fora to be organised on a regional basis is also interesting. Much of Irish politics is local, and this call acknowledges that fact.

Media's democratic role in facilitating representation of diverse sectors of society in the media

Most of the resolutions that relate to participation also relate to issues of representation. This is not surprising as the two are intertwined, but it is interesting to observe that most of the proposals to do with participation involved aspects of protection, whereas those under the heading of "Representation" refer directly and indirectly to the facilitation of participation for members of minorities and those outside the mainstream in the media.

Specifically, resolutions 2, 4 and 5, under Representation, seek to provide pathways for this. Resolution 2 calls for the regulator to enforce representation of diverse groups in the media. It proposes that

> *"Coimisiún na Meán ensure balanced representation of all groups in the public programme schedule, both in terms of content and presenters"* (Resolution 4, Representation)

Resolution No. 4 proposes that

> *"The NUJ and media owners should establish participation initiatives within media outlets to ensure representation of minority groups"* (Resolution 4, Representation)

Resolution No. 5 calls for

> *"All media stakeholders to respect, recognise, protect and portray the complexities of individuals and entities in an unbiased manner. New media reports to reflect diverse opinions fairly".* (Resolution 5, Representation)

Taken together, these show that the members of the Irish Citizens' Parliament were concerned to provide opportunities for minorities to be involved in media production and to have their perspectives portrayed in at least two ways – fairly about them but also fairly by them.

It is interesting to note that these resolutions call on media owners, managers and journalists to ensure that there is a diverse range of representations in terms of content and of staff, whereas most other resolutions proposed tend to call on state agencies, politicians and the EU to introduce or enforce existing regulation to ensure that the media act. The Regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, figures in many of the different types of resolutions but this clear division of responsibility is interesting and was not noted by the citizens or by the researchers during the process of conducting the parliaments.

Resolution No. 2 clearly lays the ultimate responsibility to ensure participation by all groups, minorities and others in society in the media at the door of the Regulator. However, taken in

conjunction with Resolution No. 5 above, the two resolutions show the citizens' understanding of who should be responsible for providing the participation of diverse groups and the coverage of a wide range of diverse perspectives, while also understanding the need for a higher authority with power to ensure that they do so. This demonstrates a mature understanding of the rights of minorities in a liberal democracy to representation and to participation and to the necessity of these rights being enforced.

Resolution No. 4 under "Representation" goes further. It acknowledges that the representation of minorities may not happen without specific and clear pathways to enable members of minority communities to represent themselves. As the Slovenian Citizens' Parliament has termed it "Nothing for us, without us!" (see chapter 6.3). The Irish citizens emphasised their belief that representation should be for all and by all, "Of people and for people", during their deliberations on Day 3. During one exercise, the citizens were asked to write their understanding or thoughts on representation and one citizen explained to the group that

> *"We all need to understand that minority populations need space and safety to tell their stories and not have others tell them (stories) for them".* (Female 6).

Another participant questioned whether the negative stereotypes of the ethnic minority community of Travellers in media and film in Ireland may be reinforcing the stereotypes in Ireland. Everyone agreed with this statement by one individual who declared that

> *"Visibility is the most important part of representation".* (Female, 3).

These resolutions are reflective of the understanding of representation and misrepresentation. Resolution No. 4 can be seen to address these issues as it calls on the union of journalists and on the owners of media businesses to put concrete measures in place to facilitate the participation of diverse sectors of contemporary Irish society.

One resolution shows a lack of faith in the media to perform this democratic role of representing diversity if left to their own devices. In this instance, the citizens placed a responsibility to ensure balanced and fair representation of all parties on the Regulator, Coimisiún na Meán and they proposed that

> *"The Oireachtas (Irish houses of parliament) should review legislation to allow Coimisiún na Meán to conduct more regular media reports, ensuring balance in the positive, negative and accurate reporting of media outlets".* (Resolution 1, Representation)

This is consistent with their understanding of democracy as being primarily representative democracy and of their reliance on other agencies, particularly the legislature and the regulator to protect them.

They did however task the government with finding the finances to resource and organize paid journalism apprenticeships to encourage more working class and other marginalized people, particularly younger people, to enter the profession (Resolution 3, Media Systems.)

Media's democratic role in facilitating participation:

The citizens believed that the media should support and facilitate participation and their discussions moved between general suggestions as to how participation could be facilitated to discussions about who should be represented as described above.

The members of the Irish Citizens' Parliament were excited about the idea of community media. Even though there are three community radio stations and a number of physical and online community publications in the area, they were not aware of their existence. They thought that these would be an excellent way of ensuring participation in the media for every person living in the country and tasked the government with providing funding for non-commercial media to be dispersed by the local authorities as they saw fit (Resolution 1, Media Systems). They did not envision any potential conflict of interest between state funding and community autonomy.

Seven of the ten resolutions passed by the parliament on participation call for greater protection of citizens and audiences rather than for greater participation itself. They recognise that people are active on digital platforms, particularly on social media platforms, and they differentiate between production and consumption, but they believe that citizens need formal and professional protection from online harm.

Some of these can be deemed quite concrete and technical in nature. For example, one resolution calls for

> *"The EU to conduct regular critical analyses of personalised algorithms to reduce the personalisation and targeting of algorithms"* (Resolution 4, Participation)

Some of the calls for protection also recognise the need for citizens to be proactive and vigilant in protecting themselves, and they call for education to support them in doing so. For example, one resolution calls for

> *"Youth education programmes to place more focus on the consequences of posting on media platforms"* (Resolution 8, Participation)

and another resolution calls for

> *"The EU to require social media platform owners to input individual options for delayed posting on platforms"* (Resolution 10, Participation)

to give people a chance to reflect and avoid making impulsive comments that could lead to harmful interactions. Several resolutions were made about media literacy interventions, see below.

Discussions amongst citizens about protection began in consideration of children and then extended to vulnerable adults, and these are reflected in Resolutions 6, 7 and 8 under Representation specifically. However, over the course of their deliberations, they came to recognise the need for protection to be provided for all. This could be considered to be a paternalistic approach and the limitation of personal freedom that goes against the stated understanding of democracy as something that guarantees individual liberty and freedom of choice. Alternatively, it may be seen as one of the duties of legislators in a liberal democracy.

Whichever inference is drawn, protection from harm was clearly a major concern for the Irish Citizens' Parliament, being the most frequent theme running through the resolutions arrived at.

The citizens were aware that participation in the media is not a simple matter. They believed that people need to understand how the media work and how democracy can be either undermined or promoted by the media and they produced several resolutions calling for media literacy that would directly or indirectly facilitate participation in the media. Without being aware of the Habermasian concept of communicative competency (Habermas 1970) they were aware that some actors are better able to present themselves on the media than others. So, they called for measures to equip ordinary citizens to be able to perform on a more level playing pitch once they got the chance to participate in the media. These are discussed now as two forms of media education – media literacy and the capacity building for media agency.

Media Education:

The Irish Citizens' Parliament was concerned that audiences, i.e. their fellow citizens, may not be sufficiently protected and informed to engage fully in the democratic processes of their country or to understand and make critical judgements of news stories. In this case, they proposed a number of what can be termed media literacy initiatives.

As observed above, some of these were coupled with calls for direct protection interventions by national EU legislation and regulations, for example, one resolution calls for

> *"All bodies to introduce more robust protection and better education for minors and vulnerable adults who use social media".* (Resolution 7, Participation)

Another resolution was quite comprehensive and specific, both in terms of the range of skills that the public needs education in and in the range of bodies that should work to provide such education. It calls for

> *"The Departments of Communications, Education, Coimisiún na Meán, etc., to implement initiatives amongst all age groups to promote, inform and encourage the public in participation in the media; media literacy; ethics and critical thinking."* (Resolution 4, Media Systems)

Several resolutions recognise the need for media literacy, for example this one that does not state who should provide this. It proposes that

> *"Media literacy campaigns include education on attitudes, ethics, and the impact of media participation on the individual"* (Resolution 3, Participation)

This resolution demonstrates a good understanding of the dangers of social media engagement and of the range of topics that a media literacy campaign needs to cover. It specifically identifies the power of unregulated actors in the digital sphere to influence societal and individual attitudes and values, and it uses the word "ethics" with a good understanding of what these might entail. A discussion on ethics arose and the citizens questioned the quality of the information that they are reading and listening to. They also queried if there is a responsibility on the media to act independently and to supply unbiased information. They debated if the media have a responsibility to educate their audiences about how to identify information that may be biased, how to check out sources and how to cross compare between different news providers to come to their own conclusions and opinions.

Personal responsibility was also discussed in the context of ethics. Citizens questioned media use and media literacy, with one group reacting to this question posed by a woman at their table who asked:

> *"Are we ethical in the way that we disseminate media? Are we ethical in the way we talk about people in the media, like 'trial by media', as well? You know, is there any, like, ethical responsibility there to like challenge fake news, challenge stereotypes, and encourage people to, like, engage in education and stay out of social media echo chambers?"* (Female, 2)

While Resolution No. 7 under "Participation" (see above) did not specify which bodies should educate minors and vulnerable adults, or what they should do exactly, another resolution identified a particular risk for young people. This is the danger of young people exposing themselves to unwanted attention from sexual predators, of posting comments on social media platforms that could come against them in their future adult lives and, in particular, the risk of exposing themselves to radicalisation and recruitment by anti-democratic and dangerous groups. The resolution proposes that

> *"Youth education programs place more focus on the consequences of posting on media platforms"* (Resolution 8, Participation)

This recognises that some work is already underway in terms of the media literacy education of young people, but it places the emphasis on building awareness of the consequences of participation in social media for individuals.

One resolution identifies the body that the citizens believed should be responsible for providing some of the media literacy education that the citizens call for. It proposes that

> *"Coimisiún na Meán [The Irish Regulator] conduct awareness advertisement campaigns concerning their role and the capacity of the public to engage with them"* (Resolution 9, Participation)

While media literacy education programs are understood to be designed to empower individuals to make informed choices that protect them with a clear understanding of the consequences of engagement, only one resolution proposes a practical opportunity to empower citizens in their own protection. This proposes that

> *"The EU shall require social media platform owners to input individual options for delayed posting on platforms"* (Resolution 10, Participation)

This recognises both the agency of individuals and the role of the EU in attempting to manage and regulate globally owned and operated social media platforms.

SRQ1b: Consensus and political struggle over future perspectives in the Irish National Citizens' Parliament

Citizens achieved a high degree of consensus on almost all resolutions proposed in the parliaments. Twenty of the 22 resolutions were passed by an overwhelming majority, with either a unanimous vote or over 16 votes in favour of the resolution, giving between 80-100% approval. Only one resolution was opposed by a minority of any significant size, but even here the resolution was adopted by 10 votes for, 4 votes against, with 4 abstentions. This was

Resolution 5 on "Participation" relating to traceable identity for posting on digital media platforms. No resolutions were rejected by the Irish National Citizens' Parliament.

One reason for this high level of consensus on resolutions was because of the process employed during each day. The largest part of each day was spent in the deliberation phase and citizens understood that each activity was designed to enable them to formulate resolutions that would be put to the entire parliament. Each activity was designed to ensure that all twenty citizens got to debate the issues in small groups and with different sets of people before the resolutions were brought into the formal, parliamentary sessions and so much of the discussion, debate and argument had already been held before resolutions were formally proposed in parliament. The citizens spent the time of deliberation engaging in robust but respectful dialogue and debate, and they moved closer together to a collective understanding of each issue and therefore to a resolution that they could support.

As they had decided to have a secret ballot on each resolution, the parliamentarians were free to change their minds on reflection or to vote differently from the way the group had been formulating the resolutions, but as outlined above, this was not observed to happen.

There was very little variation in terms of ideological perspectives among the group if these are taken as ranging from the Far Right to the Far Left. Although the participants were not screened for such political orientations, they fell into the broad pattern of moderate left to moderate right with the majority being in the centre and this is in line with the general population, and indeed with the media in Ireland, although the Far Right appears to be gaining some support currently.

Some ideological issues were observed, however, and these were primarily:

- tensions between the rights of individuals versus the collective and
- the balance between pragmatism and idealism.

These were two somewhat contradictory strands, and they were noted during the coding process and on reflection on the findings. They are offered below as interesting and unforeseen findings.

Protectionism versus individual freedom

Irish citizens tended to look to the state and other powerbrokers for protection of the media and of themselves. Several of their resolutions call on the EU, on Ireland's parliament and on the Regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, to force media to act ethically and to provide services for citizens. These include calls for existing legislation to be implemented for example one resolution that proposes that

> *"The Government ensure that Coimisiún na Meán has the resources and ministerial support required to ensure it can implement and enforce the Digital Services Act and the Online Safety and Media Regulations and these are to be reviewed regularly (EU).* (Resolution 5, Media Systems)

There was little awareness that such "protection' might interfere with individual freedoms except in one case. Only one of the resolutions sparked real disagreement and this arose because of the difficulty of balancing an individual's right to privacy with understandings of the need for protection of the public generally. The resolution called for

> *"The EU to introduce traceable identity to post on media platforms"* (Resolution 5, Participation)

The majority of participants, old and young, were in favour of this, but a few participants were against it, with one of the younger men in particular becoming quite exercised. Arguments were made for and against this resolution in the two groups that were drafting resolutions. Both groups had been very engaged in the discussion, citing various reasons as to how to make the resolution functional, and it was finally realised that this would probably be an aspirational resolution and very difficult to implement. When the resolution was drafted and brought into parliament, it was again debated, and it was passed with 10 votes for, 4 against and 4 abstentions out of a ballot of 18. This was accepted by all. The individual who was most concerned about it, expressed his disappointment and felt that it was a reduction of or incursion into personal freedoms but he made a point of acknowledging that he understood that this was part of the democratic process in action and that the majority view should hold sway even where he disagreed with their decision.

It should be noted that this was the issue or resolution that had the most votes against it of all 22 resolutions, but that these amounted to only 4 out of 18, i.e. a percentage of 22%. It provides a good example of how the democratic process works and how the Irish citizens respected the system and engaged with the process. Each citizen had their voice heard, and all accepted the decision that was achieved by voting.

This tension between individual freedom and the protection of the collective can also be traced in some discussions and in the final resolutions that show a pull between a desire for protectionism and a desire for agency. As noted above many of the Irish resolutions called on powerbrokers to protect citizens through regulation, legislation and the enforcement of these. However there was a contradictory pull towards individual responsibility and agency with a recognition that individuals need to be equipped, empowered and facilitated to manage this.

Idealism and Pragmatism

Citizens were mainly practical and concrete in formulating their resolutions. Having struggled with how to phrase their demands and aspirations on the second day, they adopted a formula suggested by the research team. This formed a type of template whereby the citizens identified the issue clearly and then identified who should be responsible for addressing it. This relieved the tensions of the first day's deliberations and difficulties in formulating resolutions where some people were concerned about how the issues could be tackled and what could be done. They became frustrated when they could not see solutions to the problems that they had identified. Once they adopted the formula of "Who… should do what.. about what?" and once they realised that they did not have to figure out how this should be done, they relaxed and were able to be more visionary and idealistic.

For example one resolution calls for *"Social media platforms to be treated as publications in law and in regulation"* (Resolution 6, Media Systems). If it were possible to do this, it would solve many of the problems citizens identified with disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, items that give offence or incite hatred, etc. However, this resolution may be seen as more naïve, aspirational and less well-informed than others, as it has not proven possible for governments at any level to actualise this. The citizens did realise this; many recognised that

this resolution was aspirational because of how difficult social media is to control and regulate compared to print and legacy media. One participant said

> *"On the media side, from a control and regulatory point of view, the print media would be easier to control in this quality because it's physically generated and based and printed in Ireland. The trouble with social media, that a lot of these websites' internet, such as TikTok, et cetera. They're all based in other environments, i.e., not in Ireland, so it's impossible to control them. But their feeds are available here. So, it's do we go down the road of cutting off the feed, availability in Ireland, because we don't like the content? But then it's going back, and we're not going to allow the government to control our media!"* (Male 8)

But they proceeded to propose and adopt the resolution because they had been relieved of the challenge of working out how it was to be achieved and could think aspirationally and idealistically.

SRQ1c: The balance of power relations within the process of the Irish Citizens' Parliament

Initially, all power resided in the research team. The participants did not know each other in advance of the first day and they were not sure what to expect in terms of the process. This was addressed through the introductory session where it was made clear to them that they would be expected to take control of the proceedings themselves. They were told that the members of the research team would endeavour to "fade into the background". With the exception of the requirements of the script or schedule that they were told was being followed in each of the four countries conducting a national citizen's parliament, they were told that choices, decisions and the ways of working should become more and more under their control rather than under the facilitators. This happened more quickly than anticipated and the citizens enjoyed this. External intervention by the facilitators was less day by day and was mainly confined to the timing of activities, the organisation of lunch and the introduction of experts, although even here, citizens took the initiative as described below.

The power relations that characterised the process of producing the recommendations of the Citizens' Parliament were well-balanced throughout. This was a result of the understanding of the participants that everyone was to be respected and that everyone had an equal right to their opinion and to speak it. This understanding was made explicit through an exercise on the first day that meant the participants had to outline the ways in which they would interact with each other. They discussed how they would speak and how they would ensure everyone got a chance to speak and to be heard. They were very clear on what would not be tolerated, for example, use of the mobile phone, shouting or using bad language. These were jokingly referred to as "The Rules of Engagement", and they were displayed on a poster on the wall each day.[9]

[9] Rules of Engagement devised by the Irish Citizens' Parliament on Day 1:
1. No phone use.
2. Acknowledge the different ways people express themselves: some people may wish to write on a card and ask someone else to speak for them.
3. No bad language – no attacks – show respect.
4. Ceann Comhairle – Chair/Speaker/moderator to control proceedings.
5. A speaking stick/ conch/ noble call/ hands up to be used to keep the conversation/ discussion flowing or to close down the circle.
6. Listen to one another with respect, wait for the person to stop talking and think before you answer.

They included a number of practical methods of ensuring that those who were shy or less inclined to push themselves forward would also be heard. For example they suggested the use of a 'speaking stick'; the suggestion that someone could nominate someone else to speak to the group for them or that this person could read out their thoughts to the group for them and that there should be a chair/moderator or speaker (known in Ireland as the Ceann Comhairle) to control and manage proceedings.

The facilitators and co-ordinator also kept a watchful eye throughout and consulted regularly with each other to check if individuals were perhaps talking too much, too long or over others. The Irish team benefitted from having experienced facilitators and from the training in the Art of Hosting received in Vienna in late 2024. In cases where individuals were perceived to be speaking far more than others, they used a number of discreet interventions to bring the person and the mood in the room back to an even, calm level. For example, they tailored the next activity so that new people had to speak; they produced "the speaking stick" and handed it to someone who had been quiet, who then handed it on to the next person and thereby ensured that everyone got a chance to speak. In most cases, where someone had been overdoing it a bit, the citizens themselves reigned them in with a joke or a request to "let So and So in here now!". This happened more as the citizens got to know each other and to see how the process of deliberation could be actualised. By the end of the second day, individual citizens were being more assertive in making room for quieter participants asking them to give their opinions and requesting that "someone else should speak now".

There was only one occasion when the power relations were challenged in any significant way. This happened during the first voting session on Day 2, when there was a degree of confusion within the parliament pertaining to the process of voting. Because it was the first time the group sat in parliament, people were intent on producing resolutions. As a result, one citizen became a little over excited. The facilitator who had been chosen to take the role of "Ceann Comhairle" (Speaker of the House/Chair of the Parliament) stepped in and dispersed the tension by speaking calmly, reminding the citizens that all parliaments get passionate about their goals and changed the focus of group by asking *"How would you like to proceed with the time you have left today?"* This defused the tension and handed the power back to the group of citizens and away from this one person who was dominating proceedings. A solution was suggested by a citizen who proposed delaying the voting until the next parliament, and this was agreed by a show of hands. The management of the situation was commented on by one participant on the feedback survey when asked, "What was the one thing you liked most about this meeting of the citizen parliament? The citizen replied, *"How one person in parliament can bring back a sense of calm in the midst of a rushed session. Impressive"* (Female, 5).

The approach to facilitation known as "The Art of Hosting" recommends varying the activities and this helped to ensure that one person did not dominate again. Citizens were usually gathered together first as a group of twenty, then in groups of five and eventually in two groups of nine or ten. They all had an equal opportunity to contribute and to engage in exercises to highlight their understanding of the issues they were addressing and would like to address. This meant that even the quietest and shyest of participants felt happy about contributing. It also meant that the groupings changed and this impacted on the dynamics with no group being taken over for too long by a strong or more vocal individual who could otherwise perhaps have dominated. Moving around the room and joining different groupings meant that some citizens

brought a report or summary of the discussion they had just left to the new group. Sometimes however this experience was used as a way of supporting their own argument for example this person who said

> *"I was guessing. It wasn't, okay. And you're going to do the other. Okay, I don't. So, we have, like the OTHER TABLE, and I think kind of like the vibe that came from our conversation and also from what's written down here, is kind of about a sense of ethics."* (Male 8)

The citizens worked well together, respecting the rules of engagement and self-nominating to be the spokesperson for the table or engaging in group timekeeping, for example. They also responded well to using "the speaking stick", and through self-monitoring, they enforced its use with ease. There was only the very rare occasion the facilitator needed to encourage its use, as discussed earlier, and this was more because of personality type, which can manifest as dominating the conversation, than because of disrespect or a desire to dominate. People conducted themselves like the mature and respectful adults that they are.

The researchers had expected that one of the incentives to participate in the parliament would be the opportunity to go on a trip to Brussels in 2026. The citizens were asked to put themselves forward as candidates to be chosen to represent the parliament in Europe. It was agreed by the twenty participants that those interested would self-nominate by email and be prepared to perform at a hustings to their fellows at the final parliamentary session. In fact, to our surprise, only four people put themselves forward and as only two did so within the time limit specified, these two were chosen as the representatives, with the two who had missed the deadline named as substitutes should these be needed. The citizens discussed this and unanimously agreed to proceed with these people as their representatives at the level of local democracy when presenting the resolutions to Limerick's City and County Council, at the level of national democracy when presenting the resolutions to the National Parliament in Dublin and at the level of international democracy when presenting the resolutions to MEPs in Brussels. The selection of two 'substitutes' proved to be fortuitous as they were needed, one represented the CP at the level of local democracy in Limerick City and County Council on 14.07.2025 and the other represented the CP at the level of national democracy at the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Media, Communication, Culture and Sport on 05.11.2025.

Gender was not observed to be an issue and men and women were equally talkative and were listened to with respect by all. Age was a factor in power relations on the first morning with older people talking more and some younger members of the parliament saying nothing at all, even in small groups. However this changed quite dramatically after people got to chat informally over lunch. Over the course of the four days people from each end of the age spectrum came to respect the different experience and knowledge of the other. So the older people turned to the younger ones for information and advice about how digital, in particular social media worked and the younger ones listened respectfully when the older people shared examples of the media and democracy working and not working in their own lived experiences.

The observers' reports bear out the view of the researchers and of the citizens themselves in their exit interviews and anecdotally that the Irish iteration of a national Citizens' Parliament was a good exercise in practical and respectful democracy. One where each citizen had the right and facility to speak, and one where each citizen felt heard in safety and with respect.

As a result, power relations were perceived to be well balanced and fair, and the issue of unbalanced power relations did not really arise. The resolutions were achieved in a fair and consensual manner, and the secret ballot or voting on each reinforced the autonomy of each individual participant in the process.

Handling conflict during the process

Some members of the parliament clearly enjoyed debate and the sound of their own voices more than others, but it is interesting to note the comments in the ethnographic report that show who these are and how the quieter members of the group began to speak as time went on, particularly when in smaller groups. These people were often more influential when they did speak, as is frequently the case. One such person said in his exit interview that he only spoke when he had something to say. He was very clear that he felt perfectly happy to sit and listen to the others and to only make a comment when he felt it might be useful (see discussion in section 5.4, SRQ2a)

Some people like to talk all the time, others are more reflective. Some people perform well in front of a large group, others come into their own in smaller groups. The different sizes of groups arranged for different discussions and the different methods learned from the Art of Hosting training, all made for a non-confrontational experience for the citizens.

Irish people are accustomed to open and lively debate and do not generally view this as "conflict"; rather, they see it as healthy and important in a situation where people have differing views. They are accustomed to arriving at consensus through robust discussion, disagreement and debate and see it as an essential component of democracy itself. One person who was not born in Ireland provides a good example of this. She asked to address the parliament to apologise to the members for *"seeming angry and biased due to how fast and rushed everything was on the first day"* (Female 4). The other members of the parliament were astonished and told her that they hadn't noticed this at all and tried to reassure her that she had nothing to be concerned about or to apologise for.

Achievement of collaboration during the process:

The most important element in ensuring that collaboration was achieved during the process was the willingness of the citizens themselves to participate and to do so in an open, respectful and enthusiastic manner. These were all people who responded to the recruitment campaign, so from the start, they were enthusiastic and knew that they would be required to collaborate. The icebreaker on the very first day helped people to connect with the person beside them on a personal level, and by sharing their story with the group, the exercise not only encouraged active listening but also became a collaborative process. Agreeing on "the rules of engagement" (see above) set the scene for mutual respect.

It was important to facilitate the citizens, to welcome them, ensure that they were physically comfortable and that they felt safe to contribute and participate. It was also crucial that they trusted the facilitators, the coordinator and the process.

The goodwill and voluntary investment of the citizens in the project were consolidated and supported through good preparation and facilitation of the activities organised for the citizens, through attention to the comfort of the participants, for example, in the catering and in the layout of the rooms occupied. For example, dividing the groups into smaller groups of five for

the World Café activity worked very well in ensuring that people got to know each other. Encouraging the participants to put themselves forward to take the position of speaker for each group in the parliament when they entered formal sessions helped create a fair and inclusive environment. The Art of Hosting's ways of working are useful tools and are conducive to the production of a collaborative environment.

It is worth stating the obvious here too: the participants all understood clearly that they were expected to produce useful recommendations for different agencies and actors so that the media of the future can protect and promote democracy. This gave them a goal, and they were task-oriented, working as a team to formulate resolutions that they knew would go to powerbrokers and stakeholders and therefore have an impact. That is a very powerful way of harnessing people's intellects and energies, and the Irish citizens worked well together to achieve the outcome of arriving at agreed resolutions that they expected would have an impact on the democratic functioning of the media in the future.

5.4 Findings and analysis: Research question 2

Research Question 2: How are democracy and media constructed in the participatory process of the citizen parliament?

Secondary Research Questions:

a) How is participation performed in the CP? Which (sub)processes are forms of minimalist / maximalist participation?
b) How is democracy constructed in the CP? Which core components are accepted (or not), and how do the citizens in the CP position themselves towards the relevant political struggles and threats?
c) How are media constructed in the CP? Which core components are accepted (or not), and how do the citizens in the CP position themselves towards the relevant political struggles and threats?

Overview: Construction of Democracy and Media in the Participatory process of the Citizens' Parliament

Collective understanding of democracy was achieved by the citizens in two ways – through explicit discussion of democracy as a concept and as a political system and through the practice of democratic interaction and engagement in the process of working together in the Citizens' Parliament. In other words, through perception and practice, both achieved collectively.

Democracy

The citizens accepted democracy as both the norm for society and as the best system for government for the country. They never considered any other political system. They favoured representative democracy over participative democracy in theory. In practice, they regularly called for opportunities for greater participation by members of the public in both the democratic system and in the media. For example, they passed a resolution to have a regular forum, held on a regional basis where politicians would be held to account by the public through the offices of the media (Resolution 1, Participation).

They tended to regard the democratic system as something that happened "away from or outside of themselves", referring to things that politicians did, to laws and to regulation rather than as something that they might have a responsibility for or an input into. They expected the state to protect citizens and had faith that their elected representatives would do this.

Media

The collective understanding of the media was achieved through a combination of learning from the experts invited to address the citizens each day, deliberation and discussion about the topics that arose as a result and from the sharing of individuals' experiences of the media. This was particularly evident when older people consulted the younger members of the group about how social media operated and when younger people listened to older parliamentarians when they cited examples of the media performing in particular ways over the course of their lifetimes.

Media were constructed primarily as products, prepared by professionals that people consume, rather than as a something that members of the public can or should produce for themselves. They had knowledge and experience of public service and of privately owned, commercial media but they had never heard of not-for-profit or community media. While they were very taken with the idea of the opportunities for participation in the media offered by community media, they still believed that this should be provided by others, hence the resolution regarding the provision of funding (Resolution 1, Media Systems). Even in the case of social media, where the consumer is also the producer, or prosumer, the citizens tended to view the platforms, rather than the citizens who use them as responsible for content. They sought to have them treated as publications in law to counter disinformation, defamation etc. (Resolution 6, Media Systems). They opted for regulation and legal measures in dealing with any issues where they feared the media may not be acting ethically, impartially or in a trustworthy manner putting the responsibility to ensure compliance on the state and its bodies.

The practice of participation in the Citizens' Parliament revealed the deep appreciation the Irish citizens had for the core elements of democracy and for the main functions or roles that the media should play in protecting it. Observation of their engagements with each other and analysis of the transcripts of their discussions and deliberations show them exercising the principles of respect for individuals and for the right to freedom of expression, the right to be heard and the responsibility for each to listen to others. Where individuals were not in favour of resolutions that were passed by the majority of the parliament, they clearly understood that this is how democracy works in practice and were content to accept the rule of the majority. How participation was performed in the Irish Citizens' Parliament is now discussed.

SRQ2a: Performance of Participation in the Irish Citizens' Parliament

Participation was performed in the first instance by each participant turning up for each day. Once there, each and every participant applied themselves to the tasks required to work as a team or a group to formulate useful resolutions that would facilitate the media in supporting democracy. They listened carefully to each other; they spoke and contributed in the general sessions and in small groups. Through open discussions and healthy debates, in setting their own rules of engagement (see section 5.3, SRQ1c above), the citizens created a good environment for voting on their resolutions, and they respected the outcomes. The citizens

were pro-active in their engagements with each other and with the process and they quickly took on responsibility for conducting their discussions and moving towards agreement and the formulation of resolutions.

Opportunities to participate were carefully planned and supported in the background by the facilitators using many of the tools from the Art of Hosting. For example, varying the types of activities to keep discussions fresh and keep citizens motivated; changing the size and constitution of the groupings; moving locations within the large room, even alternating between sitting and standing and between working at tables or working in a circle and these concrete measures worked well to ensure active and meaningful participation in the main. However, there were occasions noted during the CPs by the facilitators and the observers when two participants did not participate as freely in the larger group discussions with twenty people as they did when they were in the smaller groups of four or five people and again during lunch and coffee breaks. This was addressed using the speaking stick during the larger group discussions and by going around the circle during any exercise where participation was important. This ensured that every person was allowed every opportunity to contribute.

Enactments of participation ranged from what can be termed maximalist to minimalist levels of participation. This was detailed in the coding trees, and the main evidence is extracted from them. This discussion is summarised in Table 5.1 below.

Maximalist Participation

Four members of the parliament took a more active role than others, and their actions could be interpreted as attempts to perform more maximalist types of participation. These citizens voluntarily formed a drafting committee to refine the wording of the resolutions. This committee met to redraft the wording of the resolutions between sessions, and they presented them to their fellow citizens for consideration. This is seen by the research team as a valuable exercise in democracy, where the citizens recognised that they could not manage to do everything within the time allotted and where they prioritised reaching a general consensus over the issues that required resolution, rather than achieving precise formulation or wording of resolutions within that limited time. They chose to delegate some of the responsibility and work to those within their group who they recognised had the ability to write well and who were willing to put their talents at the disposal of their fellows.

One of the drafting committee members researched and wrote a resolution between sessions and spoke of it to the CP, where it was discussed and voted on. Those who self-nominated to present the resolutions on a local, national and European level and performed hustings during the parliament also provide evidence of maximalist participation.

To an extent, maximalist types of participation could be said to have been engaged in by all members, most of the time. However, this was partly due to the script adopted in consultation with the research partners and followed in each parliament. Members of the parliament were expected to participate fully, and they did so in each activity and stage. However, on one or two occasions, particularly towards the end of the four days, some members of the parliament took a more active role than others, and their actions could be interpreted as attempts to perform more maximalist types of participation. In particular, those who volunteered to represent the others during the dissemination phase, those who took on the drafting role at

small tables each day, those who became a drafting committee between sessions, and those who presented the resolutions in the parliament.

Minimalist Participation

Minimalist participation, where members voted in parliamentary sessions but did not contribute in any meaningful way at any other time, was not really observed. It simply could not be said to have been a characteristic of people's participation. All members of the parliament spoke at different times; all members of the parliament listened to the experts and to each other; all members of the parliament reflected on what they heard, and they each contributed to the formulation of resolutions. Therefore, all members of the parliament actively participated in the democratic process. Table 5.1 below shows some instances of minimal participation where people remained silent in the larger groups.

Minimalist participation could be described as citizens who rarely contribute to the conversation or during deliberation sessions. While it was observed that some citizens participated less actively at different times, this definition of minimalist participation can be contested and may need to be revisited. This can be seen in the case of one citizen, who was highlighted by the observer's notes as *"not contributing as much as others"* and as *"looking around the room"*. He gave a different perspective on his silence in his exit interview. He did not see his silence as non-engagement or as minimalist participation at all. When asked, "How do you feel about your participation in the Citizens' Parliament now that the last meeting is over?" he responded by saying:

> *"I participated relatively well. I think everyone participated relatively well. But I think we all sort of gave our views and opinions quite well, and I sort of, well, I wasn't one of the most talkative ones at times, but I did step in with my opinions when I felt like they were like, you know, valid. When I felt like I had something to say or whatever."* (Male 3)

This participant also acted as a speaker on two occasions for a table during the World Café, and he presented draft resolutions during parliament and so we need to remember that participation does not always mean speaking.

During the exit interview, a citizen who took an active role in the drafting committee made a comment about those citizens who may have been *"less vocal and may have only contributed when they had something to say."* She said that:

> *"I was just thinking some of the people, including myself, are among this. I would say we're more vocal than others, and I thought there were a couple of people who really didn't involve themselves at all, but most of the people did."* (Female 6)

This is valid from her perspective, as a person who performed a more active type of participation than others. She could be considered a leader, but it begs the question of whether leaders, or at least more vocal and active participants in democratic processes, may be "better" at democracy. In fact, the opposite may in fact be true; leaders and very vocal participants may not understand the scope of difference and the range of ways in which people choose to participate in democratic processes. They may miss the value of the more reflective contributions of the quieter members of society.

Table 5.1 presents the main categories taken from the coding trees, showing evidence of maximalist and some minimalist participation by citizens as observed occurring during the process. These are given in two columns and are ranked in order of how frequently they were observed to occur.

Examples of maximalist participation	Examples of minimalist participation
Creation of rules of engagement	Choosing a secret ballot as the form of decision making
Engaging in debate	Preferring to let others represent them
Having confidence to postpone voting when unsure of how to proceed	Being unwilling to compete or put self forward
Being willing and having confidence to question experts	Being happy to go along with however others wanted to conduct proceedings
Delegating of roles during group work	Being happy to work when asked; being unwilling to do anything extra between parliamentary sessions
Requesting more information including inviting extra experts	Listening to experts but not questioning or engaging in discussion with them
Proposing to set up a drafting committee to work on resolutions between sessions and willingness to volunteer to be a member	Relying on a moderator (evidence only on Day 1)
Self-nominating to be a representative for the Citizens' Parliament at meetings with politicians	
Willingness to perform at a husting	
Proposing to vote publicly	
Formulating and presenting a resolution between sessions (one individual)	

Table 5.1: Examples of maximalist and minimalist levels of participation as observed and ranked according to frequency of occurrence noted

SRQ2b: The Construction of Democracy in the Irish Citizens' Parliament

Collective understanding of democracy was achieved by the citizens in two ways – through explicit discussion and through the practice of democratic interaction and engagement in the process of working together in the Citizens' Parliament over the four days and between sessions. So, by discursively forming perception and by enactment or practice.

The discursive construction of a collective understanding of democracy: Perception

The question "what democracy means to me?" was explored and discussed by the participants on the first day. Their collective understandings of how democracy should function at the national level were posted on the wall for citizens to refer to during the course of the four days (Resolutions booklet, p. 8; see Appendix A.3). This they did regularly, and they used them as guides for how they should behave themselves. They were further informed by their

engagement with invited experts and by their deliberations on each of the four days the parliament met but it is interesting to note that their collective definitions of democracy did not change substantively over the two month period. These principles informed their discussions and their resolutions and their actual engagement with each other as individuals and in the group.

The members of the Irish Citizens' Parliament tended towards a reliance on a more representative form of democracy than towards a more participative form of democracy in their conceptualisation of how democracy should function. This is reflected in many of their resolutions where they call on elected politicians and state bodies to act for them and to keep the media in line. On the other hand, they did explore some ways of enabling citizens to participate more in the democratic process when they proposed that the media would work with the public to hold their elected representatives to account (Resolution 1, Participation).

This understanding of democracy as being a representative democracy is clearly implied in the statement that declares that democracy *"is where countries govern for the good of all citizens"* and in the statement *"Listening to our people, to what they want and deliver on policy"*. These show an acceptance that power is granted to politicians to lead and rule, but there is a strong demand that this be for the good of all and that policies, laws and regulations should be driven by the stated needs and desires of the people.

Specific principles as to how democracy should function were identified by the citizens. They said that democracy should operate in an open, transparent, fair and honest manner. Several of their comments referred to freedom, to independence and to autonomy, For example, *"Freedom to choose how we live, who our leaders are and in a society that does its best to treat all fairly"* and *"Autonomy of thought, of actions, the possibility to think and act autonomously without being dictated to"*. These qualities or values were highly prized and were clearly linked to democracy in the minds of citizens, who expected ethical behaviours, just laws and the guarantee of basic freedoms from their democratically elected representatives. They also believed in the rights to have *"freedom to choose who represents you and the freedom to voice your opinion, and when you do, to be heard"* (Male, 1). They agreed with the comments made in the group discussion that democracy meant *"Freedom to choose how we live, who our leaders are and in a society that does its best to treat all fairly"* This was explained by one citizen as being a way of ensuring that the common good is paramount. She said

> *"democracy is a system where everyone's views and opinions are taken on board, considered, have the final decision is made for the common good".* (Female X)

Some statements, including those categorised above, include a desire for greater possibilities for the people to be involved. They demonstrate expectations of a more participative type of democracy. Statements such as *"Democracy is putting my views out there with the expectation that they will, at the very least, be considered"* show an understanding and desire that democracy should be a two-way process involving the elected and the electorate.

The understanding that democracy is not just a right, but a responsibility is also highlighted in the exit interviews and is explained by a citizen who said

> *"I suppose it kind of comes down to the right and responsibility of each of us to kind of participate in the wider, our wider communities, and I suppose I'd link it back to it's both a right and a responsibility, depending on the context."* (Male, 5)

One woman summarised it when reflecting on the collective construction of democracy:

> *"For me, I suppose it's freedom to choose how we live and who our leaders are in a society that does its best to treat everyone fairly"* (Female 7)

The collective understandings of how democracy should work were carried through to the discussions and formulation of concrete resolutions as to how the media could and should be strengthened, protected and supported to promote and defend democracy.

The citizens understood that it is not a perfect system, and when commenting on democracy in the exit interviews, one citizen explained that democracy to her was

> *"I think for me, democracy is always about self-advocacy and for representation, you need political and social capital to engage. That's kind of how I feel about democracy. I don't think it's always a perfect system that works because people are at the very centre of it, but that's what I think democracy is."* (Female 1)

The enactment of democracy in the Irish Citizen's Parliament: Practice

The participants in the Irish National Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy were all adults who had participated in the political process to varying degrees over the past five years. All had done so to the extent of casting a vote in elections, and others had been involved in community and other activist movements. None of them had been involved in any formal political party or movement. They came to the parliament curious about how it would be organised but with a good understanding of how to conduct themselves appropriately, respectfully and effectively in a democratic assembly.

This was obvious on the first day when the participants were asked to establish a guiding set of principles as to how they would engage with each other. A set of rules for "how we will treat each other" was proposed, discussed, and adopted by the citizens, and these were also posted on the wall on each succeeding day. These were referred to from time to time, if and when individuals felt that they were in danger of being transgressed. The citizens identified six 'rules' by which they agreed to abide, and these were discussed in a very relaxed and calm manner (see section 5.3., SRQ1c above). They ranged from reminding themselves that everyone should be heard and all views were to be respected to concrete suggestions for how to ensure that this happened, for example no phone use and turn taking in discussions.

The "rules of engagement" show a responsible and respectful approach to listening to and engaging with the opinions of others. This was a priority for people, and it enabled debates, at times quite contentious, to be held where people felt safe, happy to contribute. They are a practical manifestation of the core principles identified by the citizens in relation to what democracy itself should be and of how they expected that they would conduct themselves as a group, i.e.

- respecting others and their opinions
- listening to different perspectives
- informing oneself to understand issues more deeply

- debating and deliberating to reach consensus
- facilitating the representation and participation of others.

This collective agreement of how they should operate was adhered to almost all of the time by all of the participants. On the rare occasion where someone infringed on these "rules", others were quick to point to them where they were pinned on the wall, and the person reprimanded was quick to apologise and order and relative harmony was restored.

Voting

The citizens recognised the difference between discussions and deliberations in the general and in smaller groups. This was evident in their proposals as to how they would conduct themselves in formal parliament. On the first day, before ever entering the parliamentary session, voting by secret ballot was discussed, proposed and voted on by public vote, in the form of a show of hands. This was the only time that a vote was organised in this way, and a secret ballot was facilitated for each and every subsequent vote as a result of this decision.

It was also proposed that the citizens would elect a Ceann Comhairle (Irish word for Moderator or Speaker of the house) and that this person would not have a vote. This created a dilemma for the citizens as they realised that this would mean one of them would lose their power to cast a vote. After discussion, it was proposed that the role of the Ceann Comhairle be taken on by a facilitator. This role would only require the facilitator to maintain order when needed and to ensure that everyone got the opportunity to speak in turn in the formal parliamentary sessions. The group chose a facilitator to take on this role for them.

This early and clear identification of the difference in how business should be conducted in a formal session of parliament and in the information, deliberation and planning or drafting stages shows a mature and clear understanding of how parliamentary democracy works in Ireland.

On the second day, citizens became stressed when it was clear to them that they had not formulated their resolutions for the parliamentary session well enough to be able to vote on them. One citizen proposed that voting should be held over to Day 3 and the others eagerly agreed. They decided to devolve some responsibility to a sub-group to draft or re-word the resolutions more clearly in the intervening two weeks and they agreed to come in early on Day 3 to hold an extra parliamentary session to vote on the newly re-worded resolutions. In this way, the citizens moved away from external control by the research team and began to operate as autonomous, self-regulating actors, practicing effective, maximalist participation in the CP process but they also show evidence of minimalist participation by ceding the power to craft the wording of their resolutions to a smaller group.

This decision encouraged the citizens generally to have confidence in themselves as "political actors" and to engage in research outside of the parliament. One citizen formulated a draft proposal to be considered by the citizens, addressing issues in Irish journalism. This related to the lack of working-class people in journalism and to the retention of trained journalists within the sector. She consulted with the research team between parliamentary sessions and introduced her proposal to all at the start of the next day. The proposal was accepted, the wording was worked on, and the resolution was passed by unanimous vote. This prompted the citizens to decide to establish a drafting committee to work on the wording between each parliamentary session to avoid delay on the final day. These are good examples of how the

parliamentary process can work smoothly, even when faced with problems. They illustrate how citizens empower themselves when they take charge of situations, offer solutions and follow through working in a democratic and collaborative way to make progress. It also highlights the importance of the research team being flexible in accommodating citizens so that they exercise their autonomy rather than being stuck too rigidly to a script.

The citizens moved to ingroup moderation, with less reliance and reference to the research team over time. One example serves to illustrate this. Two participants were observed by the ethnographic note taker and by the facilitators to be talking far more than others. Four individuals were noted as hardly speaking at all in the large group on Day 1. These were flagged for the facilitator to encourage to speak going forward however, the citizens themselves noticed this and addressed it. One citizen suggested that the facilitator could intervene. The facilitator reminded them that they needed to take control of the proceedings themselves, that this was how democracy worked and that the facilitator would only intervene as a last resort. Another citizen referred back to their "Rules of Engagement" and suggested using the "speaking stick" to encourage all members of the group to participate and to discourage those who tended to jump in and dominate the conversation. It was decided that the use of a speaking stick would be the preferred intervention. This worked relatively well but was not always a success, and two participants continuously interrupted or spoke for too long. The research team's collective reflection, drawn from observation, from the ethnographic notes and from the exit interviews is that this should not be taken as an anti-democratic impulse. Rather, it should be understood as a difficulty in personality type where these two people were inclined to become excited and voluble, but this was managed, as described above, by their fellow parliamentarians over time.

The atmosphere engendered was consequently one of harmony and consensus, and this was maintained throughout, even where people disagreed. It shows that the participants in the Irish Citizens' Parliament valued and prioritised a number of democratic practices and they identified a number of struggles and threats that they attempted to address in their resolutions.

Struggles and Threats

The main struggles and threats that the citizens identified in their construction of democracy were to do with failures in the democratic and media systems due to lack of participation and due to non-compliance with existing regulations and accepted norms of good practice. They did not tend to look outside the existing structures of Ireland and the EU's democratic and media systems for threats or for solutions.

They specifically mentioned the influence of toxic posts on social media in inhibiting people from coming forward to stand for election.

They were concerned about the dangers of people becoming disaffected and therefore disengaging from the political process, in particular by not exercising their right to vote.

They were concerned about the lack of respect for and trust in politicians by the general public. They believed that this was part of the reason for the decline of interest in politics by many of their fellow citizens.

The rise of the Far Right was discussed on occasion but was not a major concern for members of the parliament. They were far more concerned with the use of bots and algorithms to sway

people's political views rather than the issues of the Far Right and this interest in digital media platforms is discussed below in Section 5.4, SRQ2c.

SRQ2c: The Construction of Media in the Irish Citizens' Parliament

Freedom was associated strongly with the concept of democracy, the freedom of individuals to speak and the corresponding right to be heard. The responsibility for ensuring that people are heard was seen as a core feature of the media but one that was threatened by lack of resources, time pressure and increasingly by lack of regulation of digital media.

Media were seen as allies of citizens, as a necessary tool in ensuring that democracy is protected and can function appropriately. As discussed in section 5.3., SRQ1a, the citizens' understanding of the roles and functions of the media in supporting and facilitating a democratic society align closely with the five democratic roles outlined by Carpentier and Wimmer when they say that these range from

> "the traditional support for an informed citizenry and the watchdog role, to the organisation of agonistic debate and generating fair and dignified representations of society and its many (sub)groups, to the facilitation of maximalist participation in institutionalised politics and media." (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025: 2)

All five democratic roles of the media were addressed in the citizens' resolutions but were not recognised explicitly as such by the citizens i.e. Information; Watchdog; Forum; Facilitating Representation and Facilitating Participation. For example

- The media reports on events (Resolution 1, Representation)
- The media performs a watchdog role, ensuring politicians are held to account (Resolution 1, Participation)
- The media should ensure balanced representation of and for all (Resolution 2 and 4, Representation)
- The media should ensure diversity of participation (Resolutions 2 and 3, Representation; Resolution 4, Media Systems)

The citizens expected that the media should perform these roles as can be seen in the resolutions cited above and they call on them to do more, although they understand that they are under serious financial strain and this is reflected in their resolutions (See Resolutions 1, 2, 3 and 5, in Media Systems)

They also understand that greed, one could say capitalism, but the citizens did not use the word, is causing sectors of the media to move towards lazy reporting, to neglect their duties as the fourth estate and to go for quick and easy profits.

The media were understood by the Citizens' Parliament to consist of three main sectors: public service, commercial and not-for-profit. The not-for-profit or community sector was not well known to most participants before the experts came in to offer information sessions, but the citizens were very taken with this sector, and they called for government funding to be made available for them to be able to operate on their behalf (Resolution 1, Media Systems).

The platforms on which media are provided were differentiated by the citizens as "legacy" or "traditional" (i.e. print and broadcast media) and online media. Citizens were most concerned about the more recent, contemporary phenomenon of digital media, particularly about social

media platforms. While most of the discussions and focus of the citizens concentrated on news and current affairs, citizens often conflated and mistook social media for digital media. In general, citizens tended to feel that legacy media were objective, fair and of a reasonable quality. They believed that they were quite well regulated and that citizens' interests were protected by law, regulation and by journalists' own ethics. However, they were very concerned about digital media, particularly about social media and many of their resolutions focus on these specifically. They called for

> *"Social media platforms to be treated as publications in law and in regulation"* (Resolution 6, Media Systems)

They tasked the EU to *"conduct regular critical analyses of personalised algorithms to reduce the personalisation and targeting of algorithms"* (Resolution 4, Participation). They also called for

> *"The EU to introduce traceable identity in order to post on media platforms"* (Resolution 4, Participation)

and for

> *"The EU to require social media platform owners to input individual options for delayed posting on platforms"* (Resolution 10, Participation)

This fear of social media corresponds with trust in legacy media. It may be a symptom of the common fear of the unknown but it was a strong feature of the citizens' debates and deliberations and it led to very specific resolutions and to a request for an information session with the Regulator, which was provided on Day 4.

Struggles and threats

The main struggles and threats identified by the citizens in relation to the performance of the media in support of democracy are identified as being commercial and staffing pressures; lack of legislation and regulation and poor implementation where these exist; lack of transparency in terms of standards and a decline in ethics and therefore quality, in particular in the case of social media.

The citizens' resolutions calling for protection, particularly for users of social media, reflect this. They looked first to government, both the Irish and EU parliaments to put legal measures in place to protect citizens. Then they looked for resources, both the power and the money, for the Regulator to implement these legal protections. They placed some responsibility on those working in the media and finally, they placed some responsibility back on citizens to protect themselves and to exercise their own agency.

5.5 Short concluding reflection

The participants in the Irish National Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy were very positive about the experience. Apart from, or maybe because, of the fact that they enjoyed the process so much, they were energised and enthusiastic about the importance of protecting democracy. They left the parliament on the last day, proud of the 22 resolutions that they had formulated and confident that these would be brought to powerbrokers and stakeholders who could actually act on them. This commitment continued after the last day as they were keen to

be in attendance on each occasion when their representatives were presenting their resolutions to politicians. Ten of the citizens attended the public presentation of their resolutions to their local councillors in Limerick City and County Council on 14th July 2025. Ten, not all the same people, travelled to Dublin to present their resolutions to the Joint Oireachtas [Parliamentary] Committee for Arts, Communications, Media, Culture and Sport on the 5th of November 2025. Four of the group put themselves forward to travel to Brussels on the 13th of January to present their resolutions to members of the EU Parliament and the Commission of the EU and two of them did so.

The promise that their work would have impact was a crucial motivator for the participants in the parliament. From the very first day, they were told that this process would not be an empty talking shop but result in their views being heard at the highest levels. They were shown a map on each of the four days that showed a clear pathway that they could walk together to arrive at resolutions that would have an impact. Beginning with a cloud that asked "What is Democracy?", they could trace their progress along this pathway at the start of each day in the parliament. Seeing the places that their resolutions would be brought and understanding that people in power would receive them, would listen to them and might act on them was a powerful motivator for them. They were encouraged to hear and see that their resolutions would also go to those involved directly in the media including Coimisiún na Meán, the Irish Regulator for the media and The NUJ (National Union of Journalists).

No member of the Irish National Citizens' Parliament was active in any political party and many of them declared that they did not have a high level of interest in politics. However, they quickly became engaged and extremely interested in politics at all levels during the process. They were all consumers of media and they shared and swapped examples of media coverage of a range of issues, good and bad, throughout their deliberations leading to informed and lively discussions.

They were, without exception, more interested in politics and more keenly aware of the role of the media in protecting the fragile processes of democracy as a result of participating in the National Citizens' Parliament in Limerick in the Spring of 2025 than they had been when they first arrived to take part in this important part of MeDeMAP's research project.

This experiment in combining Participatory Action Research (PAR) with the relatively new methodological approach of conducting a citizens' parliament or assembly has proven to be highly successful. It could be used as a model for other research projects and for institutions and bodies seeking to work collaboratively and effectively with those most concerned with the issues that need to be addressed

6 Slovenia

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6.1 Organisational report

Timeframe

The Slovenian Citizens' Parliament (CP) sessions on media and democracy took place in Ljubljana between March and May 2025. A total of four sessions were held at two-week intervals, except for the final session, which was conducted four weeks after the third due to national holidays (i.e., 15 March, 29 March, 12 April, and 10 May). Each session began at 10:00 and concluded at 16:00, lasting approximately six hours. This duration was selected based on local circumstances and practical considerations, as it was recognized that, within the Slovenian context, longer sessions would likely have made it difficult to recruit participants and ensure consistent attendance across all four sessions. At the same time, the six-hour format provided sufficient opportunity for presentations, discussions, and participatory activities.

Participants

The Slovenian Citizens' Parliament was initially composed of 22 citizens from across Slovenia. The first CP was attended by 20 participants, the second by 20 participants, the third by 16 participants, and the fourth by 18 participants.

Participants were recruited through a public call for applications disseminated via the Peace Institute's social media channels (Instagram and Facebook), official website and repeated newsletters. Public call was also disseminated through two online media outlets – non-profit community media and political weekly. To ensure the broadest possible diversity, a list of various organisations (including civil society NGOs, volunteer associations, and other community groups) was contacted and asked to forward the call to their members and networks. This approach aimed to reach an audience beyond Ljubljana, inviting participants of different backgrounds and age groups from across the country. Additionally, pamphlets and posters containing the call to join the CP were displayed in multiple locations around Ljubljana and distributed in public spaces to engage individuals outside the Peace Institute's social media reach. In total, 31 people responded to the call. Participants were chosen to reflect the demographic composition of the Slovenian population, in line with data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia 2024 report. This was particularly challenging with regard to gender balance, as significantly more women responded to the call. As a result, this represents one of the main deviations from the general statistical distribution in Slovenia across all categories considered in the participant selection process. Among the 22 participants, the majority were women (72.7%), followed by men (22.7%), and one non-binary person (4.5%)

A total of 40.9% of participants originated from Ljubljana; however, participants were also present from towns across almost all Slovenian regions – Styria, Upper Carniola, Lower Carniola, the Coastal-Karst region, and Inner Carniola – with the exception of the Pomurska region. Among the participants, three had a migrant background, including two persons from Ukraine and one from North Macedonia. In terms of employment status, most participants were

employed (40.9%), followed by retirees (22.7%). A smaller proportion were unemployed (13.6%), students (9.1%), and self-employed individuals (4.5%). This indicates a predominantly active working population, with a notable share of retirees and a modest representation of unemployed individuals and students. Regarding education, the largest groups held general secondary education (27.3%) or undergraduate degrees (27.3%), followed by postgraduate qualifications (22.7%). A smaller share had higher professional education (13.6%) and secondary vocational education (9.1%), suggesting a slightly higher educational level than the national average in Slovenia.

In the recruitment questionnaire, participants were also asked about their interest in following news and current events, with all respondents indicating that they were either "interested" or "very interested." When asked to place themselves on a left–right political scale (1 = most left-wing, 10 = most right-wing), most participants identified on the left side of the spectrum: over 70% (13 of 18) placed themselves between 1 and 3 (left-wing to centre-left). Only a few (3 respondents, 16.8%) placed themselves on the right side (6, 8, or 10). The average score (3.1) indicates that the group was predominantly left leaning overall.[10]

Location

All four CP sessions were held in the same location – the conference hall of the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (Zveza svobodnih sindikatov) in Ljubljana. The capital was chosen as the venue because it is the most logistically accessible city in Slovenia, both by public transport and by car, thereby facilitating participant attendance. The conference hall is accessible by elevator, bright, and spacious, with movable furniture that supported a participatory atmosphere: chairs could be arranged in a full circle or distributed into smaller groups around tables. The location is well connected to public transport, with nearby bus stops, and the main train and bus stations are less than a 10-minute walk away. For participants arriving by car, paid parking was also available.

Moderators / Facilitators

The CP included two moderators,[11] both had participated in training on the Art of Hosting method in Vienna, equipping them with facilitation techniques suitable for fostering inclusive and deliberative discussions. The first moderator was selected for her extensive experience facilitating diverse groups in a variety of local and urban settings and leading workshops on multiple topics. She primarily oversaw the operational aspects of the CP, ensuring that the process ran smoothly and that all participants understood the proceedings. The second moderator brought extensive expertise in media studies and media policy, as well as deep knowledge of and extensive contacts within the Slovenian media sector. Her presence ensured that any clarifications requiring subject-matter expertise could be addressed, thereby

[10] During the recruitment process, with extensive efforts to reach general public and ensure participation from diverse backgrounds, regions, and orientations, most citizens who expressed interest and registered to participate in the Citizens' Parliament on media and democracy in Slovenia positioned themselves toward the left of the political spectrum in the pre-CP screening questionnaire.
[11] The moderators were Julija Marošek, an experienced facilitator, and Brankica Petković, a researcher and the MeDeMAP project coordinator at the Peace Institute.

supporting the deliberation process. The combination of these complementary skill sets created a supportive and deliberative environment, as confirmed by participant feedback.

Experts / Training

The discussions were complemented by introductory information on each meeting's topic provided by international experts (with video contributions) and experts from Slovenia (in person).[12] A total of five experts from Slovenia participated in the learning phase of the CP sessions, representing the fields of democracy theory, media systems, journalism (editor-in-chief), and media management (director of digital content). Also present was the Ministry of Culture's lead expert on the new media law, whose participation was especially useful given that the legislation, including public consultations, was being developed in parallel with our CP deliberations. Experts were selected based on their professional expertise relevant to each CP session, their strong reputation in their field, and their ability to engage citizens through effective presentations. Prior to the sessions, an information package about the project and the expected tasks was sent along with the formal invitation to each expert. Upon confirmation, the project coordinator discussed the tasks individually with each expert. Video clips prepared by the project team were also shared with the Slovenian experts before each session. The experts were asked to tailor their presentations and experiences to support the theme of the session. As a result, their roles did not require alteration during the course of the CP sessions, since no major changes to the program or the topics occurred.

Script

The CP scripts were prepared by the two moderators prior to each session. They met online several times before each session to review the script and agree on the agenda, guiding questions, detailed steps with timelines, responsibilities, and required materials. The scripts were organized in table format, with rows and columns detailing each of these elements. This format was based, to some extent, on the example used by the trainer at the Art of Hosting training in Vienna and adapted to our needs. It facilitated efficient task sharing between the moderators and ensured adherence to the agenda and session timings. For instance, the schedule for CP4 was extended by 30 minutes (10:00–16:30) based on discussions at CP3, and the script was adjusted accordingly.

6.2 Analytical report

Data collection

The dataset included 29 documents generated throughout the Citizens' Parliament (CP) process, comprising transcripts from plenary sessions, observers' notes, CP minutes, post-CP

[12] The experts from the international team who presented the topics to the citizens by video presentations were: Prof. Dr. Nico Carpentier (Charles University in Prague), Prof. Dr Beata Klimkiewicz (Jagiellonian University in Krakow), Prof. Dr Jeffrey Wimmer (University of Augsburg) and Prof. Dr Andrea Miconi (IULM University of Milan). Experts from Slovenia who presented introductory information and reflections on the topics discussed to the citizens were: Prof. Dr Gorazd Kovačič (Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana), Lenart J. Kučić (Media Advisor at the Ministry of Culture), Prof. Dr Sandra B. Hrvatin (Faculty of Humanities in Koper), Matija Stepišnik (Editor-in-Chief of Večer) and Kaja Jakopič (Director of Digital Content at RTV Slovenia).

surveys, post-CP interviews, and final CP resolutions ("demands", see Appendix A.4). The plenary sessions were audio-recorded and subsequently manually transcribed. The observers' notes were prepared by two observers, research team members, each focusing on one of the central research questions, thereby providing complementary analytical perspectives on the deliberative dynamics and communicative practices within the CP, especially in group discussions. The CP minutes were produced by the moderators immediately after each session, documenting key discussion points, procedural elements, and emerging themes. After every session, a post-CP survey was distributed among participants to assess their perceptions of the process, evaluate the inclusiveness and effectiveness of deliberations, and provide feedback or dissenting opinions regarding the adopted resolutions and demands. In addition, five post-CP interviews were conducted approximately one month after the conclusion of the CP, carried out by the observers to capture participants' retrospective reflections, learning outcomes, and evaluations of the process. Finally, the adopted resolutions (demands), as the formal outputs of the CP, were reviewed by the project coordinator (who also served as one of the CP moderators) before public presentation at the participants' request, in order to ensure language consistency and avoid repetitions. The edited version was shared with participants prior to publication.

Sensitising concepts employed in the coding process

The analytical process followed a thematic coding approach supported by MAXQDA software. The initial coding tree was developed through close preliminary readings of the material and guided by the analytical template, the research questions, and the theoretical framework provided by Nico Carpentier and Jeffrey Wimmer's "Democracy and Media in Europe: A Discursive-Material Approach" (2025). In particular, the sensitising concepts that guided the coding process were derived from Carpentier and Wimmer's (2025) conceptualisation of the democratic roles of media, which informed the first research question. The second research question addressed the construction of democracy and media. Democracy was analytically divided into its two core components, participation and representation, each examined both through their enactment in the CP and through participants' discursive practices, that is, how citizens performed and articulated participation and representation, whether in reference to the CP process itself or to broader societal contexts. Within this dimension, particular attention was paid to the concepts of minimalist and maximalist participation, as well as to the processes of consensus-building, negotiation of power relations, and emergence of conflicts. Another analytical focus concerned the struggles and threats to democracy, as outlined in Carpentier and Wimmer's theoretical framework, which provided a lens for understanding how citizens identified pressures undermining democracy. The final analytical dimension of the second research question explored the discursive construction of media, investigating how citizens envisioned and defined the role of media in democracy and which struggles and threats they perceived as shaping the media field.

The coding tree was thus theory-informed and deductively generated based on these conceptual and research premises, while allowing for inductive refinement as new themes emerged from the material.

The analytical process in and across research teams

Coding was carried out collaboratively across the research team, with each member responsible for a specific subset of documents. Weekly meetings were held to discuss coding consistency, clarify category definitions, and refine the coding tree where necessary. This iterative process led to the final version of the coding framework, comprising 180 codes and subcodes and resulting in 2.755 coded segments across the full dataset.

At an intermediate stage of the analysis, the preliminary coding tree was submitted to the WP6 research coordinator for review, whose feedback and suggestions informed several conceptual and structural adjustments to the framework. Following this revision, a joint meeting involving all national research teams was organised to collectively review the individual coding trees. During this session, teams compared analytical approaches, discussed similarities and differences among the country cases.

The analytical process also involved several methodological and conceptual challenges. Managing and analysing the large volume of data required significant time, coordination, and iterative validation to maintain consistency across coders. The conceptual complexity of the research proved particularly demanding: democratic dimensions were often more difficult to capture and interpret than the media-related aspects, reflecting the research team's stronger disciplinary grounding in media and communication studies. Finally, the development of the coding framework required careful balancing between adhering to the pre-defined research questions and theoretical assumptions, while remaining grounded in the empirical material.

6.3 Findings and analysis: Research question 1

Research question 1: How do the citizen parliament participants envision the democratic roles of media in their recommendations / resolutions for future perspectives and in the processes leading to these recommendations?

Secondary Research Questions:

a) What articulations of the media's democratic roles did the participants in the CP prioritise, which were omitted and which received only limited attention?
b) Which recommendations on future perspectives received consensus within the CP? Which future perspectives were the object of political struggle, and which ideological perspectives structured these differences?
c) How balanced were the power relations that characterized the process of producing the recommendations of the CP? How was conflict handled during the process? How was collaboration achieved during the process?

Overview of research question 1: Main themes

The analysis examines how participants of the Citizens' Parliament in Slovenia envisioned the democratic roles of the media, both in their deliberations and in the resolutions/demands. The informational role, the idea that media should provide accurate, balanced, and socially relevant information, was most strongly prioritised. Citizens described media as a public good, comparable to education or healthcare, and emphasised their responsibility to serve the public interest through truthful, continuous, and contextual reporting. The representational role was

also highly prominent, with citizens stressing that media should reflect social diversity and ensure visibility, particularly for women and minorities, while avoiding stereotypes and exclusion. The participatory role was associated with the idea that media literacy constitutes a fundamental precondition for participation. Citizens viewed it as an area that should be prioritised by the state, requiring active public intervention to ensure equal opportunities for engagement. By contrast, the watchdog role, focused on exposing wrongdoing and holding those in power accountable, was recognised as important but less actively discussed. Many of its features, such as depth, ethical standards, and avoidance of sensationalism, were already embedded in how citizens conceived the informational role. Finally, the forum role, which concerns the media's capacity to create spaces for public dialogue and plural debate, was almost absent from the discussions.

The analysis of consensus formation and political contestation within the CP reveals two interrelated levels of deliberative practice: the procedural dimension of voting and decision-making, and the discursive dimension of argumentation and negotiation through which participants articulated and justified their positions. Patterns of consensus were most visible in resolutions that aligned with principles of transparency of financing and media ownership, social responsibility of media, and participatory inclusion in representative processes in the media. The most pronounced example was the subtopic of the media economy, where unanimity was achieved around demands for stronger state intervention, regulatory oversight, and transparency in media ownership and financing. This convergence indicates an underlying collectivist orientation rooted in Slovenia's historical legacy of a strong public sector and a normative commitment to media as a public good. Similarly, resolutions within the domain of media representation reflected a shared belief in inclusivity, epitomized by the maxim "nothing about them without them," which embodies an ideology of participatory democracy and epistemic justice.

Overall, power relations within the CP were relatively balanced, sustained by a structured and collaborative environment. However, they remained conditioned by factors such as gender, age, language proficiency, and perceived expertise, which at times constrained equal participation. Dominance within groups was primarily articulated through the mobilisation of professional or experiential authority, whereas facilitative interventions by moderators and (World Café) group hosts functioned as mechanisms of productive power, fostering inclusion and enabling informed deliberation. These dynamics can be conceptualised as authority embedded in expertise and procedural roles rather than exercised through coercion – although such instances still occasionally arose, manifested through interruptions and the overriding of contributions by certain participants. Nonetheless, power also functioned as a productive force, particularly when participants expressed uncertainty regarding their competence yet were encouraged to participate collectively, exemplifying in-group support as a mechanism for empowering non-experts and reinforcing participatory agency within the deliberative process.

SRQ1a: Media's democratic roles envisioned by citizens in the resolutions and in the process

The analysis of the research question synthesises the citizens' perspectives and reflections on the democratic roles of media articulated in the process of Citizens' Parliament (CP) in Slovenia. The emphasis is on understanding how citizens envisioned the media's contribution to democracy and which democratic roles of the media were prioritized or omitted in their

deliberations. The theoretical framework on democracy and media developed by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025) within the MeDeMAP project served as the theoretical foundation for the analysis. This framework identifies five core democratic roles of the media: informational, watchdog, forum, representational, and participatory.

Informational role

The informational role of the media is grounded in the idea that citizens must have access to accurate, comprehensive, and socially relevant information to participate meaningfully in public life. In Carpentier and Wimmer's (2025, p. 53) view, the informational role of media supports democracy by ensuring that citizens have access to relevant and trustworthy information. Through the collection, selection, and dissemination of news on issues of general importance, media contribute to a transparent environment in which individuals can form their own political opinions.

In the process of CP in Slovenia, this role was the most strongly emphasised. Participants articulated clear expectations that media should provide accurate, verified, and socially relevant information, avoiding sensationalism and political bias. Media were described as a public good, whose primary responsibility lies in serving the public interest rather than commercial or partisan goals, and were compared to other essential public systems such as education and healthcare. This notion of the media as an integral part of the public sphere emerged as one of the most strongly articulated themes in the deliberations. The discussion also revealed a belief that civil society must be actively involved in determining agenda-setting priorities, reflecting a demand for greater participation in media's democratic processes. One of the adopted demands explicitly stated that *"Civic society should have the opportunity to influence the process of setting thematic priorities regarding what the media report on."* (CP resolutions/demands) highlighting the concrete call for citizens and civil society organisations to have an active role in shaping the media agenda.

Citizens also stressed the need for broader and more meaningful coverage, defining it beyond politics and crime, to include topics such as science, education, and community life: *"Citizen continues that the media should report on community life (especially local media), and not only on crime news."* (observers' notes, CP3) They also emphasised the importance of continuity and follow-up in reporting, stressing that journalists should continue to cover issues after the initial wave of attention fades:

> *"The lack of continuous reporting on events, socially important events. We often see that when something sensational happens, everyone reports on it for about two weeks, it's all over the media, and then suddenly, overnight, everything goes quiet. After that, we no longer know what happened or what is happening."* (transcript, CP1) and
>
> *"Journalists should report on the developments and consequences of events, not just provide short-term, intense, and sensationalist coverage of the event itself."* (CP resolutions/demands)

Another prominent concern was the need for more global and contextualised reporting, suggesting that the current media landscape is constrained by a predominantly national focus, thereby limiting citizens' awareness of broader global contexts:

> *"Media should publish more international news that is diverse, placed in a broader context, and more in-depth (…)"* (CP resolutions/demands)

Citizens also associated ethical journalism with truthfulness, responsibility, balance, and critical analysis, as captured in statements such as:

> *"Media should be responsible and ethical."* (observers' notes, CP4)

> *"Reporting should be based on arguments – presenting arguments for and against."* (poster Media and representation, CP1)

> *"Media should report and select topics with less sensationalism and with greater ethical responsibility; publish news without misleading information, including in headlines."* (CP resolutions/demands)

Watchdog role

A second traditional role of media in democracy is the watchdog function, through which media exercise oversight over those in power. Investigative journalism, in particular, exemplifies this role. The watchdog function thus represents media's capacity to challenge hegemonic power structures through investigation and critique (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, p. 55).

In the CP process in Slovenia, citizens acknowledged the importance of oversight but were uncertain about how far the media's "corrective power" should extend. The discussion focused on the idea that the media should play a more active role in exposing the misconduct of individuals in positions of power. Some questioned whether media could or should deny coverage to politicians who spread false information. One citizen asked the expert, the editor-in-chief of a daily newspaper: *"If you don't give media space to those who lie, is that even possible?"* Others said that in such a case *"there would be no politicians in the media"* and argued that *"it is necessary that people dismiss them at elections, not the media."* A counter-argument followed, emphasising that *"The media should be the first to sound the alarm, not the people."* (observers' notes, CP3)

In the discussion on the media's watchdog role, citizens raised the idea that the media should be the ones to expose "small dictators", e.g. politicians who display early signs of authoritarian tendencies. One citizen elaborated that the media, by giving such figures visibility and legitimacy, often help them rise to power: *"With the help of the media, these small dictators manage to get to power, where they become big dictators."* Another participant built on this argument, suggesting that the media should continue to report on such politicians even after they *"take office"*, rather than only when they are *"in the game for power."* (observers' notes, CP3)

The relative lack of strong focus on this role by the CP can suggest that citizens perceive the watchdog function as an inherent component of journalistic reporting. At the same time, it appears to be in some way reflected through expectations tied to the media's informational role, such as continuous and in-depth coverage, avoidance of sensationalism, and balanced, well-argued presentation of issues, which can be seen as the characteristics that enable journalism to perform its watchdog function effectively. Citizens see the role of editors in providing context and exposing hidden interests. *"Editors should filter out propaganda by exposing the underlying interests behind certain information, placing it in proper context, and thereby limiting the influence of hidden agendas and interest groups."* (CP resolutions/demands)

Forum role

The forum role is central to deliberative and participatory models of democracy, where media are expected to facilitate the circulation of diverse opinions and foster discussion (Habermas, 1996, as cited in Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025). However, this role, understood as the media's contribution to creating spaces for plural and inclusive debate, was largely absent in the deliberative process of CP. The omission of this role may indicate citizens' limited perception of media as dialogical institutions. Nevertheless, some participants suggested solutions that would allow citizens to take part in defining what counts as relevant public content, for instance through *"public editorial meetings"*. Yet, one citizen opposed this idea, arguing that *"editors have the autonomy to decide what will be published and what will be news, not the people."* (observers' notes, CP3)

Representational role

The representational role was another major theme, aligning with theoretical conceptions of media as institutions of symbolic inclusion that reflect social diversity and ensure visibility for marginalized groups. (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025, p. 59)

Regarding this role, citizens emphasised the importance of pluralism of voices, gender balance and inclusion of minority groups through the principle *Nothing about any social group without that group* included in the CP resolution/demand:

> *"When reporting on or discussing a particular social group or minority, the media should be required to include representatives of that group, their voices, and perspectives. The principle should be: Nothing about any social group without that group. If a media outlet organises a panel discussion on a certain group, at least one participant should be a member of that group, rather than only politicians or experts."* (CP resolutions/demands)

Some criticised the lack of female interlocutors in the media and discussed possible corrective measures, such as gender quotas for media representation. Yet dissenting voices were also present, opposing quota-based solutions on the grounds of definitional and ethical ambiguity, as summarized in the final report on the CP resolutions/demands in summary of separate (dissenting) opinions: *"Quotas for women and minorities in media are unnecessary because it is challenging to define who qualifies as women or minorities."*

While some participants opposed formal quotas, some acknowledged the persistence of cultural and structural barriers that limit women's visibility in the media. One participant illustrated this with an anecdote:

> *"The editor-in-chief of a commercial media outlet said that this is connected to the position of women, for example, that they don't have babysitters. For instance, they have to come to a show in the evening and say, "I can't, I have to take care of my child," or "I don't have my hair done," even that, you know? No, it may seem trivial, but it's actually important. Because if she comes and her hair isn't good, we might say it doesn't matter, but everyone will notice it, for women, not for men."* (transcript, CP1)

This comment clearly illustrated how expectations about women's appearance and gender roles still affect their participation in public life.

The discussions also extended to the representation of minorities, where participants problematised the stereotypical framing of "minority topics". As one citizen noted:

> *"They report in a way that migrants are always linked to crime, we are constantly "being bombarded with this topic". You can never hear anything about migrants who are not a problem. This is how voters are frightened, and in this way, public opinion is shaped."* (observers' notes, CP1)

Beyond gender and ethnicity, participants highlighted the absence of working-class perspectives in media reporting. As one observed: *"The voices of community, particularly that of workers, is rarely represented*." (observers' notes, CP3)

The discussions on media and representation exposed the gap between the normative ideal of representational equality and the structural realities of media practice. They further indicated that citizens are aware of how intersecting dimensions of gender, class, and minority status determine who gains visibility and voice in the public sphere.

Participatory role

The participatory role of media connects to the maximalist vision of democracy, which seeks to extend citizen participation beyond institutional politics into the sphere of communication.

There was a strong emphasis on media literacy as a fundamental precondition for meaningful participation in the media sphere. As it was stated by one participant in deliberation, media literacy is seen as: *"First, the ability to "filter and critique" and second, the ability to make use of opportunities for participation."* (observers' notes, CP4) Citizens saw this not merely as an individual skill but as a collective capacity that requires substantial state support. Their arguments pointed to an interventionist role of the state in ensuring the structural preconditions for participation through systematic media literacy initiatives, positioning it as both a matter of civic education and a core responsibility of democratic governance.

> *"Media literacy should be an instrument for empowering people and increasing their interest in participation." (poster on Media and participation, CP1)*

They argued that fostering a critically thinking population should be a strategic priority of the state. Media literacy education should begin in early childhood and continue through all levels of education. For those not enrolled in formal education, participants recommended providing media-literacy trainings through alternative programmes or workshops. They also emphasised the role of the European Union in strengthening media literacy in one of their demands:

> *"The European Union fund media literacy education for all generations, especially younger and older people, with the aim of strengthening skills for identifying false or misleading news."* (CP resolutions/demands)

However, in a dissenting opinion some questioned what might come with EU funding, suggesting that "*there could be something behind it*," and voiced reservations about the EU's potential influence in this area.

Participants also highlighted that both public and private media should actively promote media literacy:

> *“Both public and private media, whether operating nationally or locally, should take responsibility for media literacy and enabling the participation of citizens (users).”* (CP resolutions/demands)

This underscores that citizens view the media as responsible not only for providing information but also for fostering critical engagement and empowering the public to participate meaningfully in the media and democratic sphere. These conceptions thus treat media literacy not merely as a technical competence but as an essential civic skill enabling citizens to critically interpret and produce media content.

Additionally, the participatory role of the media was reflected in citizens’ demands for public editorial meetings, which would enable direct engagement with newsrooms concerning news agendas and production standards. This perspective is grounded in theoretical approaches that advocate the broadening of opportunities for maximalist participation in the media, understood as the involvement of non-professionals in media decision-making processes, or what Carpentier (2007, p. 88) terms structural participation. Both the general public and civil society organisations were perceived by the participants as legitimate actors in the formation of media agendas. Participants argued that civil society should be provided with structured opportunities to influence the process of setting thematic priorities in media reporting. More concretely, media outlets were encouraged to organise public meetings in which citizens and civil society actors could engage directly with editorial teams. As stated in the CP demands:

> *"Civil society should have the opportunity to influence the process of setting thematic priorities regarding what the media reports on. Media outlets are encouraged to organise public meetings – e.g., once a year – where the public or civil society can directly engage with them, suggest topics, or ask why certain issues are covered in a specific way. Such meetings between the media and civil society should be systemically supported (e.g., through the provision of public venues and other infrastructure). When implementing this measure, editorial independence must be respected."* (CP resolutions/demands)

A dissenting opinion, expressed during the voting process and also reflected in the post-CP survey, held that participatory mechanisms already exist in the form of readers’ letters, the RTV Ombudsman, and civil society participation within public broadcasting bodies, and that additional forms of oversight would therefore be unnecessary and potentially detrimental to editorial independence. Nonetheless, the majority of participants rejected this position and expressed support for the implementation of more participatory media production processes and structures, while explicitly acknowledging the importance of media autonomy.

Citizens also highlighted the media’s role in promoting active civic engagement, including educating audiences about their rights to participate in media self-regulatory mechanisms and establishing a national media ombudsman. The CP resolutions reflect these demands:

> *"Every media outlet should inform its audience about their rights and obligations and provide a clear and accessible process for lodging complaints about the media outlet's work, including information on where and how citizens can file complaints." and "A national-level media ombudsman should be established."* (CP resolutions/demands)

Prioritisation of the media's democratic roles in the CP

The process of CP revealed a clear hierarchy of democratic roles attributed to the media. The informational, representational, and participatory roles were most prominently emphasised, reflecting a vision of the media as socially responsible, inclusive, and educational institutions that sustain the public sphere. The strong focus on these functions indicates that citizens primarily perceive the media as providers of reliable information, responsible for plural and fair representation, which enable citizens' engagement and learning. This prioritisation also mirrors the structure of the CP process itself, which dedicated entire sessions to the topics of media representation and media participation. The design of the deliberations thus appears to have shaped the importance of these particular roles.

By contrast, the watchdog and forum roles were less developed in the citizens' discussions. The watchdog function was recognised as crucial for uncovering abuses of power and for serving as an early warning mechanism against authoritarian tendencies. Moreover, many of the characteristics typically associated with this role, such as continuous and in-depth reporting, avoidance of sensationalism, balanced and well-argued presentation of issues, disclosing context and hidden interests and a commitment to ethical journalism, were already embedded in citizens' expectations of the informational role. Similarly, the forum role, central in deliberative theory as the media's capacity to foster dialogue and plural debate, was largely absent.

SRQ1b: Consensus, political struggles and ideological differences in the resolutions production and adoption

The process of observing consensus and political struggles can be analysed on two levels of opinion expression and consensus-seeking: first, at the level of voting, and second, within the deliberation practices as participants sought to reach consensus or opposed each other in the process of argumentation. Examples of these exchanges are presented below illustrating consensus-seeking deliberation on specific thematic areas. Participants pursued consensus most explicitly during group discussions, but also in plenary discussions before and after voting on each resolution. In these settings, participants presented arguments concerning how particular demands should be formulated and explained why they should, or should not, be accepted.

Altogether, 11 of 30 resolutions/demands received unanimous support. Five at the CP on media systems and regulation, and six at the CP on media and representation. No consensus was reached on any of the resolutions/demands adopted at the CP on media and participation.

Five resolutions under sub-topic *"media economy"* in the CP on media systems and regulation received consensus (requesting some kind of state intervention related to media economy), e.g.:

> *1) "The responsible ministry should establish rules to increase the transparency of Slovenian media operations and financing, and media outlets should be required to follow these rules. In particular, transparency should be ensured regarding the sources of funding, how funds are allocated, and that the funds are used to produce socially relevant content." 2) The relevant state authorities should carry out stricter oversight of media ownership consolidation. 3) The relevant state authorities should define rules for reporting on the use of public funds in the media sector, and both media outlets and funders should comply with these rules. 4) A single*

> *regulatory body should be established for all types of media. 5) A special legal status should be introduced for media organizations that operate in the public interest, are socially responsible, and maintain transparency."* (CP resolutions/demands)

The subtopic of the media economy was one of the two subtopics in which nearly all proposed demands received unanimous support. These demands primarily focused on how the state and relevant ministries should and could ensure greater transparency in the financial operations of Slovenian media, particularly regarding the sources of their funding and the supervision of media ownership in Slovenia. The underlying idea was that the media should not operate merely as businesses but should hold a special status as organisations acting in public interest, characterised by social responsibility and transparency. The endorsement of such demands by participants indicates a strong consensus which could be attributed to a high level of awareness amongst the participants that the media carry a social responsibility even when privately owned. This perspective was further emphasised by one of the participants in the post CP interview:

> *"(…) because of their relatively great influence on us, we could easily assign them (the media outlets) many additional obligations, regarding the media and democracy."* (post-CP interview, participant 4, male).

At the CP on Media and Representations, six resolutions reached consensus. Within the sub-topic *"Media Agenda and Prioritisation of Content"*, participants unanimously adopted a resolution that:

> *"Media should: a) publish more international news that is diverse, placed in a broader context, and more in-depth; b) report and select topics with less sensationalism and with greater ethical responsibility; c) publish news without misleading information, including in headlines." Two other demands were accepted within this sub-topic.* (CP resolutions/demands)

The first stated that journalists should focus on original, in-depth reporting that explains events and their consequences, rather than relying on sensational headlines. Editors must expose hidden interests and filter out propaganda to ensure that news remains accurate, contextual, and independent.[13] The second proposed that civil society should be able to influence media priorities by participating in regular public meetings where people can suggest topics or question coverage choices. These meetings should be systematically supported with resources such as public venues, while ensuring that editorial independence remains intact.[14] Despite minimal dissent, manifested in either two abstentions or one abstention accompanied by a

[13] Total demand: Journalists should publish original news reports rather than merely summarizing content from other sources, and the news should contain substantive information. They should report on the developments and consequences of events, not just provide short-term, intense, and sensationalist coverage of the event itself. Editors should filter out propaganda by exposing the underlying interests behind certain information, placing it in proper context, and thereby limiting the influence of hidden agendas and interest groups.

[14] Total demand: Civil society should have the opportunity to influence the process of setting thematic priorities regarding what the media report on. Media outlets are encouraged to organize public meetings—e.g., once a year—where the public or civil society can directly engage with them, suggest topics, or ask why certain issues are covered in a specific way. Such meetings between the media and civil society should be systemically supported (e.g., through the provision of public venues and other infrastructure). When implementing this measure, editorial independence must be respected.

single opposing vote, both demands were endorsed, demonstrating continuing majority support for the content of the resolutions/demands. The demand supporting the influence of civil society on the media where some dissenting opinions occurred serves as an example of a clash between more libertarian and interventionist approaches that appeared repeatedly throughout the CP process. In relation to topics that became the subject of contention, minority opinions generally opposed state intervention in the proposed resolutions and demands, expressing concern that some measures might be perceived as restricting editorial independence and journalistic autonomy. A case of this rather libertarian stance is that of a participant who objected to giving civil society a greater role in discussing which topics should be regarded as socially important by the media, stating: *"If people come to these (editorial) meetings, they can exert pressure on the editors."* (transcript, CP3).

However, a demand proposing that legislation should redefine media status to include only socially responsible outlets – those reporting on socially relevant issues in a responsible manner – and that public funds should support such content and the journalists producing it was not accepted. In the first vote, the results were 11 in favour and 5 abstentions; in the second vote, following explanations from those who had abstained, the outcome was 8 in favour and 8 abstentions. Consequently, the demand was not adopted. During the ensuing discussion, the key issue that emerged concerned how social responsibility should be defined. Without a clear definition, participants found it difficult to endorse the demand. This reflected not only a recurring challenge but also a central motivation throughout the Slovenian CP: the persistent need for clear definitions and identifiable actors responsible for implementing the demands. In this particular case, the absence of a precise definition of social responsibility ultimately prevented the demand from gaining approval.

Under the sub-topic *"Plurality in Reporting"*, three resolutions were approved unanimously: one requesting that the state ensure comprehensive media literacy education for the entire population,[15] another demanding that the state legally guarantee full protection for whistleblowers; and a third urging media outlets to include the voices of the social groups they report on, ensuring representation and preventing discussions about these groups without their direct involvement.[16] Most of these demands were accepted without significant discussion, as participants treated them as self-evident and largely unquestioned, almost functioning as a normative baseline. The deliberation therefore focused primarily on the technical aspects of how these demands should be implemented in practice. The comment around the resolution that focused on the involvement of social groups in discussions concerning the issues they face can serve as a representative example of such an understanding:

[15] Total demand: The state should ensure comprehensive media literacy education for the population. This education should begin at the preschool level and continue through all stages of formal education. It should be integrated into existing school subjects or introduced as a separate subject. For those not participating in formal education, media literacy training should be delivered through workshops, with the state supporting implementation via public calls for expert organizations, NGOs, and other relevant actors. Fostering critical thinking should be a strategic objective of the state.

[16] Total demand: When reporting on or discussing a particular social group or minority, the media should be required to include representatives of that group, their voices, and perspectives. The principle should be: Nothing about any social group without that group. If a media outlet organizes a panel discussion on a certain group, at least one participant should be a member of that group, rather than only politicians or experts.

> *"In our group it was emphasised that when reporting on or discussing various social groups or minorities, such discussions in the media should not take place without their participation. As the well-known saying goes: "Nothing about youth without youth." In other words, nothing about any group without that group. If a panel is organized on a certain topic, one of the speakers should be someone who actually belongs to the group being discussed. What happens now is that there are only politicians or only experts from various fields, while a representative or spokesperson of the specific group being discussed is missing. Period."* (transcript, CP3)

This stance, expressed in the maxim *"nothing about them without them,"* functioned as a generally accepted norm among the group and strongly embodies a participatory and inclusionary ideological stance grounded in the principles of deliberative democracy and politics of recognition. By insisting that public discussions about specific social groups must include members of those groups, the citizens rejected paternalistic modes of representation, grounded in emancipatory ideals of self-representation, empowerment and agency. It is important to note that the demand that the ministry should launch a nationwide campaign to raise public awareness about how media work and why they matter, helping people distinguish news, reports, and commentary, and showing what society would be like without media[17] was likewise adopted, with only one opposing vote and three abstentions.

Finally, within the sub-topic *"Socially Responsible Reporting"*, two further resolutions were adopted: one calling on the state to provide dedicated and sustainable funding to support the regular employment of qualified journalists,[18] and another requesting that the European Union establish and finance Erasmus exchange programmes for journalists to promote professional development and training, thereby addressing past barriers to implementation.[19] It should be noted that, throughout the entire CP process, there was a high level of consensus among participants on topics that supported educational initiatives, whether aimed at journalists, young people, older adults, or other generations.

The other two demands, one emphasising that the state should provide dedicated funding for media content and sections addressing socially relevant topics in a high-quality and responsible manner, and the other proposing that the state should promote employee ownership in media organizations[20] were both accepted, with only a few abstentions and votes against. The demand regarding employee ownership was particularly contested by one participant, who argued that

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[17] Total demand: The ministry responsible for media should launch a nationwide awareness campaign about the role and basic functioning of the media. The goal is to raise citizens' awareness of what they consume in the media, for example, understanding the difference between a news report, a factual account, and an opinion piece. The campaign could, for instance, include a fictional scenario showing a society without media to illustrate the importance of media for democracy and public life.
[18] Total demand: The state should legally ensure dedicated funding for media organizations to enable the hiring of a sufficient number of qualified journalists on a regular and sustainable basis.
[19] Total demand: The European Union should establish and fund Erasmus exchange programs for professional journalists, allowing for both short- and long-term exchanges. This would contribute to ongoing professional development and training. Previous obstacles that prevented the creation of such a program should be reassessed and addressed.
[20] Total demand: The state should promote internal (employee) ownership of media organizations, for example through tax incentives and other mechanisms. This should include encouraging the social responsibility of worker ownership and strengthening its resilience against corrupt influences. Legal provisions should ensure that no individual in employee-owned media holds a majority stake or transfers ownership to someone outside the media organization.

such ownership had already existed in the past (in the process of post-socialist privatisation of state-owned media companies in 1990s) but that journalists had chosen to sell their shares. Others, however, countered that the newer generation might act differently today, and therefore the demand remains relevant.

None of the demands reached full consensus during the CP4 on *Media and Participation*. Within the subtopic "*Media Literacy as Empowerment for Greater Participation"*, support was the strongest, reaffirming the importance participants placed on education. Participants emphasised that, in order to enhance participation, people must first understand why participation is important. All three of these demands[21] were approved. However, a point of contention among the demands related to education – particularly the proposal to expand school curricula to include more content on specific topics – emerged as an object of political struggle. While some participants supported this idea, two other participants argued that young people already face excessive workloads during their studies saying: "(*I'm against it) because kids get more and more work to do every year, now we're going to give them this too"* (transcript, CP4). The discussion also considered whether this new subject in the school curriculum should include formal grading or assessments, and which pedagogical approaches would be most appropriate. The positions in this discussion appeared to be shaped primarily by the expertise of participants who were retired teachers, who expressed concern about the workload faced by children and pupils.

Additionally, the CP4 was the one in which the largest number of demands were rejected, and a greater share of participants began to actively express their opinions on the topics. This may be linked to the fact that, by this stage, participants were more familiar with the format and therefore felt more confident and empowered to voice their views, even when these diverged from the majority position on a given issue. Another contributing factor, particularly during the final CP, was that participants sometimes felt certain topics had already been sufficiently addressed in previous sessions and therefore saw no need to support a demand they believed had already been adequately considered. The demands that did not receive sufficient support and were therefore rejected include: *(1) the proposal to integrate a code of ethics into media legislation; (2) the proposal to establish a register of digital platform users, managed by the media or digital services regulator, which would require identity verification through a digital certificate as a*

[21] First demand: Responsible authorities and institutions should provide conditions and approaches that motivate schools and teachers to implement media literacy content and courses. The emphasis should be on a comprehensive approach, meaning that media literacy topics are integrated and participation is encouraged across various subjects. At the same time, continuous teacher training for teaching media literacy should be enabled, and the openness of schools to guest programs on media literacy should be promoted. Critical thinking and creativity should be central, and knowledge assessment should be descriptive only.
Second demand: Responsible authorities and institutions should implement special awareness programs on media and participation for target groups outside the formal education system. These programs should use approaches suitable to the needs and interests of the target groups. For example, for older citizens, such media literacy and participation awareness programs should be introduced through existing activities targeted at them, preceded by appropriate familiarization (e.g., through intergenerational centers, public libraries, etc.).
Third demand: The public broadcaster, RTV Slovenia, should create content (shows, segments, teletext pages, fictional programming, etc.) to promote media literacy and critical thinking. Art cinemas should screen films that critically explore media topics.

precondition for anonymous participation in online media comment sections; and (3) the proposal to introduce a legal obligation for private online media to keep their comment sections open for public participation. The main concerns raised by participants regarding these specific demands related primarily to their technical feasibility, with questions such as how the media could be compelled to adhere to the code of ethics, as well as the technical implications of introducing a digital certificate system for platform access, a measure that the participants believed could be potentially effective in reducing hate speech online. However, for the most part, the main points of contention concerned the extent of state intervention and regulation within the media sphere. The deliberation process mostly reflected a clash between interventionist and libertarian perspectives, with one participant particularly emphasising the negative aspects of tightening sanctions and regulations, arguing that the roles of both the state and civil society should be limited in order to safeguard editorial autonomy.

Furthermore, though relatively minor, some divergences of opinion were observed on another particular topic during CP4. One demand[22] concerned the introduction of gender quotas for female media speakers, with some participants questioning the effectiveness and potential impact of such measures. One participant noted: *"If something is done by force, without someone's genuine willingness (...) to force participation just because there's a quota, I don't know..."* (transcript, CP4), articulating a cautious, voluntarist stance toward enforced participatory mechanisms.

While this position reflects a general scepticism rooted in liberal individualism, another participant, whose conservative orientation more visibly shaped his intervention, stated:

> *"Now, how are we even going to define who is a woman and who isn't, since there are so many genders and minorities and so on? I think this is all kind of up in the air. Whoever is interested or willing should get involved, but others shouldn't be forced or pushed aside just because they're not the "right" gender or don't identify as the "right" gender."* (transcript, CP4).

Since these concerns were voiced only after the voting had concluded and functioned primarily as clarifications of participants' reasons for opposing the proposal, the demand on quotas remained accepted.

SRQ1c: Power relations, conflicts and collaborations in the process of producing the resolutions

Overall, the power relations within the CP were relatively balanced. Owing to the structure of the CP and the generally collaborative atmosphere, participants often expressed in their feedback that they perceived *"the prevailing atmosphere was one of constructive exchange of opinions, where we listened to each other with respect,"* and recognised "*high levels of participant engagement in discussions and presentations"* (feedback survey, CP1). However, certain factors still shaped the power dynamics in ways that occasionally had a restrictive effect – particularly gender, to a greater extent, as well as age and language barriers. The more dominant participants, who occupied a greater amount of discursive space, primarily used their position

[22] Total demand: A law regulating media should establish a minimum quota for women and minorities to ensure their participation in programming content. Participation of minorities should be defined for content relevant to them, while women's participation (female experts) should be 50% across all programming content.

to advocate for their own ideas. Instances where power relations were exercised as a positive force, by actively creating space for others or ensuring that all voices were heard, were less frequent but still present and will be further described through the description of the collaborative process.

Collaboration was achieved through both external and internal inputs. External input was provided primarily by the moderators, who offered facilitation and subject-matter expertise. For instance, the moderators' knowledge played a role in sustaining the quality of the deliberative process. The capacity to provide clarification when questions emerged during the group sessions (such as inquiries concerning the existence of a European-wide Erasmus-style initiative designed to promote journalism education and exchange) ensured that the discussion remained grounded in factual and contextual awareness. This informed facilitation resolved moments of uncertainty and consequently enabled participants to more precisely define and articulate their proposals in alignment with the existing landscape of initiatives which illustrates a dynamic that could be conceptualized as a form of productive power relation within a vertical structure, in which the moderators occupy a position of greater power due to their role in the CP process. In this sense, expertise functioned as a contribution to the collaborative process, reinforcing the notion that knowledge serves as a constitutive condition of democratic engagement. This dynamic resonates with what Carpentier (2017, p. 20, as cited in Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025) describes as the *conditions of possibility* of democracy understood as a discursive-material assemblage enabled by a constellation of processes that, while situated outside democracy itself, remain essential to its sustenance. Knowledge, therefore, becomes a central element in democratic configuration, mediating the interplay between participation and informed deliberation.

At the structural level of the CP, deliberation was actively facilitated to ensure equitable participation and a more horizontal distribution of power and influence among participants. The use of the World Café method, which centres around working in small groups, particularly enhanced participants' collaboration and participation, as these formats provided more space for individuals to express their opinions and discuss. Participants who were ideologically aligned generally found it easier to collaborate; nevertheless, throughout the CP deliberation process, a strong interventionist ideological background consistently shaped the debate and influenced which demands were ultimately prioritized. This view was mostly supported by the majority of participants, who regarded the state as the primary actor that should intervene. Although one dominant participant held a strong libertarian ideological stance, this did not alter the group's overall opinion and can also be seen in the adopted resolutions/demands.

In a post-CP interview, one participant observed that by the fourth (final session) participants were already more empowered in terms of collaboration, so he noted that the group at the end differed from that at the beginning in terms of participation and collaboration. This was largely due to participants becoming increasingly familiar with the CP structure, as well as feeling more comfortable with one another, which allowed them to express their opinions more openly. Collaboration was fostered through deliberation, the joint development of communication rules that participants agreed on (such as raising hands), and collective decision-making around voting within the CP, because these mechanisms created a structured and participatory environment in which all participants could contribute while also enabling them to determine how the decision-making processes would take place.

Internal input where power acted as a productive force emerged within the groups through the encouragement provided by certain group discussion hosts, who appeared to assume a facilitative responsibility for the CP operation. On one hand, they actively sought to foster consensus and mutual understanding, initiating clarification through statements such as *"If I understood you correctly"* (transcript, CP3). On the other hand, they demonstrated sensitivity to the group's internal power dynamics by deliberately inviting contributions from participants who were less confident or initially hesitant to express their opinions. Through these practices, these hosts played a significant role in cultivating an inclusive and balanced deliberative environment that supported equitable participation. It should be noted that the hosts who most frequently exhibited such facilitative behaviour were women, and, overall, stronger collaboration was observed in all-female groups. This gendered dynamic was particularly noticeable in one instance where a female participant, who had previously expressed her opinion in an all-female group became more restrained when participating in a mixed group that included a male participant with a more dominant communication style, interrupting her contributions, which led her to remark: "*He doesn't let me speak at all"* (observers' notes, CP2). This was further reflected in the feedback form, where one participant noted:

> *"He interrupted twice with unnecessary sub-questions. It was inappropriate. The other members were fine. We listened to each other and contributed our opinions."* (feedback survey, CP2)

The dominance of certain participants was most evident in the amount of discursive space they occupied when advocating for ideas they considered important, which at times exerted a persuasive influence on the group.

Beyond the gendered dynamics, dominance within the groups was also linked to participants' perceived or actual expertise. Some participants asserted authority by invoking their professional background, for instance, one participant legitimized her position by stating, *"I'm a methodologist*", while another, with expertise in law, was frequently consulted by others, who presumed she possessed the most informed answers because of her knowledge on legislation. Another example of supporting an argument through expertise occurred during a discussion on ways to further financially support quality journalism, when she drew on her experience working in a non-governmental organization and emphasised that *"funding through EU projects is not ideal, as the calls for proposals are highly demanding and may constrain journalists in their ability to engage in critical reporting on the EU."* (observers' notes, CP2). Overall, these instances of drawing on one's own expertise were often closely connected to specific experience within the specific area of expertise, with the goal of sharing informed perspectives on potential challenges or the benefits of particular approaches that were being discussed within the CP.

Additionally, in one instance, tensions also arose between younger and older participants, although these appeared to reflect differing ideological perspectives rather than direct generational conflict. For example, in one group discussion, two younger participants strongly emphasised the participatory role of civil society in shaping media content, while two older participants opposed this view, articulating a position grounded in a more libertarian ideological perspective by stating, *"If people attend the meeting, they can exert pressure on the editorial board."* (observers' notes, CP3). Among them, two participants of different ages expressed their positions with notable dominance, persistently defending their viewpoints. Although the group

ultimately achieved a partial consensus, the interaction was characterized by younger participants' active efforts to seek common ground, whereas the older participants seemed to remain committed to their initial position.

Lastly, with regard to power relations, language also functioned as a significant power factor, partially affecting the participation of three individuals with migrant backgrounds. At times, they were not fully understood by other participants, which created obstacles to expressing and asserting their views. An illustrative case involved a participant whose first language was not Slovenian and who attempted to articulate her opinion on the importance of the concept of "*meritocracy.*" During her explanation, several participants interrupted and challenged her contribution with statements such as: "*Madam*, *are you sure? Perhaps it's best if we stage a revolution.*" or *"this isn't even a topic*," (transcript, CP4) further hindering her ability to express her viewpoint. However, these contributions were almost always met with resistance from other participants during the CP deliberation process. In this particular case, responses included statements such as, *"If you believe this is an important topic*, *let's put it up there*," or, *"If I understand you correctly*, *you meant…*" (transcript, CP4). This dynamic was further emphasised by a participant in the post-CP interview, who noted that she wished to see greater collaboration from certain participants and highlighted that language proficiency can significantly affect an individual's ability to participate on equal terms within the group.

Another aspect of in-group support may be conceptualised as a validation of *ordinariness*. During the process of the CP, particularly in its initial stages, some participants expressed scepticism about their role in formulating resolutions/demands, noting that they were not experts. This was evident, for example, during the selection of topics: *"I'm not a media expert*, *maybe some of the things we'd like to include in the requirements already exist*." (observers' notes, CP2). Later, the same participant expressed concern if "we," as the citizens' parliament, are in a position to represent the demands of all citizens of Slovenia:

> *"You know, I think the fundamental problem is how we'll achieve legitimacy as a kind of citizens' parliament. In short, how we'll determine what the interests, expectations, demands, or proposals of the majority or perhaps even everyone, actually are."* (transcript, CP2).

In both of these instances the others reassured him that this is not important, since as a group they are formulating demands without claiming to be experts or be representative of the entire country (observers' notes, CP2), and they encouraged him to take part in the formulation of demands nonetheless which illustrates the ways in which consensus is sought (as well as the group's supportive and positive attitude toward the working process) within the citizens' parliament.

Overall, no major conflicts were observed within the smaller groups or during the plenary sessions. When conflicting opinions did arise, they were primarily addressed through deliberation and, when necessary, voting. This deliberative approach often led to consensus; however, the outcome depended on which participants actively engaged in the process. The group hosts (in World Café), as well as other attentive participants, frequently played a crucial role: if they were less sensitive to power dynamics or less committed to ensuring that all participants had the opportunity to express their views, and focused primarily on reaching consensus, conflicting opinions tended to remain unresolved, and the group would move on to another topic without fully addressing the disagreement.

6.4 Findings and analysis: Research question 2

Research Question 2: How are democracy and media constructed in the participatory process of the citizen parliament?

Secondary Research Questions:

a) How is participation performed in the CP? Which (sub)processes are forms of minimalist / maximalist participation?
b) How is democracy constructed in the CP? Which core components are accepted (or not), and how do the citizens in the CP position themselves towards the relevant political struggles and threats?
c) How are media constructed in the CP? Which core components are accepted (or not), and how do the citizens in the CP position themselves towards the relevant political struggles and threats?

Overview of research question 2: Constructions of democracy and media in the CP participatory process

The CP process revealed normative and ideological engagement with democracy that emphasises political equality, mutual respect, and participatory agency. Participants consistently framed democracy as a system in which every voice should be heard, reflecting Bass's (2005, as cited in Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025) conception of democracy as a political community grounded in equality. Simultaneously, participants expressed critical reflections on the current state of liberal democracy, noting the growing influence of capital and political elites and identifying parliamentary parties as mediators of elite interests rather than the broader public will. This critique underscores a tension between representation and participation, which participants sought to address through proposals enhancing direct democratic mechanisms (e.g., preferential voting, decentralization, and regional governance) while positioning the state as a principal facilitator of participatory reform. Education and knowledge emerged as central to democratic functioning, with participants advocating for media literacy, critical thinking, and lifelong learning as instruments for fostering engagement across age groups. These initiatives were framed as mechanisms to combat citizens' nonparticipation, a perceived threat to democratic efficacy, and aligned with broader arguments that education constitutes a necessary condition for meaningful democratic involvement (Carpentier, 2017; Flores, 2014, as cited in Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025).

The analysis of the CP process reveals several overarching themes in how citizens constructed the role of the media in democracy. The media were understood as an essential part of the public sphere, a core democratic institution and public infrastructure crucial for sustaining informed citizenship and collective accountability. Citizens expressed a strong belief in the need for state intervention, calling for regulation, sanctions, and systemic safeguards to ensure transparency as well as social and ethical responsibility. Their discussions revealed a deep distrust in market self-regulation, as they identified economic and political pressures, particularly ownership concentration, capital influence, and profit orientation, as major threats to media freedom and integrity. In response, participants envisioned a comprehensive reform of the media system through legal and institutional innovation, including a proposal for a special legal status for media organisations, strengthened internal (employee-based) ownership

structures, and public funding mechanisms to support the production of socially relevant content. Citizens emphasised the need to strengthen ethical accountability and self-regulatory mechanisms within the media. They envisioned a system in which legal recognition supports the authority of self-regulatory bodies, media outlets are obligated to inform users about complaint mechanisms, and media owners become responsible for the ethical integrity of content. These measures reflect a broader expectation that accountability should be a shared responsibility between the state and the media, ensuring that professional standards are upheld and citizens' rights are protected. Taken together, these perspectives articulate a vision of the media as a repoliticised public good, whose legitimacy depends on active regulation, democratic oversight, and ethical responsibility.

The CP process brought to light recurring themes in how participation was perceived and enacted. Participation was seen as carefully facilitated process that enabled citizens' engagement with democratic practice. Discussions were described as inclusive and respectful, with participants emphasising that everyone had the opportunity to speak and be heard. Decision-making combined deliberation and negotiation, balancing majority voting with careful recognition of minority opinions. These patterns highlighted the participants' reflections on what constitutes fair and effective democratic practice. Citizens actively contributed to maintaining equality in participation, at times even assuming moderating roles themselves to ensure balanced dialogue. However, subtle power asymmetries emerged, as participants with stronger rhetorical or thematic expertise occasionally influenced the group more visibly. Structural and practical constraints, particularly limited time, language barriers for participants with minority background, and non-anonymous nature of voting, were perceived as the main obstacles to full inclusion. The CP's design intentionally promoted maximalist participation by creating opportunities for citizens to deliberate collectively, co-create resolutions/demands and actively engage in democratic practice. Participants' reflections indicate that these opportunities fostered feelings of empowerment, mutual learning, and an appreciation for inclusive dialogue. At the same time, participation fluctuated between maximalist and minimalist modes, showing how citizens navigated and enacted their democratic agency within a structured participatory framework that can both support and subtly constrain full engagement.

This section examines how the CP process illuminated citizens' understandings of democracy and media as mutually constitutive elements of the democratic public sphere. Within the CP, participants articulated democracy as a participatory practice, grounded in equality, mutual respect, and civic agency. They critically redefined liberal democracy, revealing its subordination to political and economic elites, and proposed mechanisms to re-embed decision-making within citizens' collective agency. Education and media literacy emerged as essential structural conditions for democratic renewal, fostering informed and active participation. At the same time, citizens constructed the media as a core democratic infrastructure, indispensable to sustaining transparency, accountability, and public dialogue. Rejecting the notion of market self-regulation, they instead framed the media as regulated, transparent, and ethically accountable actors, whose legitimacy depends on public oversight and social responsibility. Together, these perspectives reflect how citizens in the CP process co-produced a vision of democracy and media as interdependent foundations of a vibrant and participatory public sphere.

SRQ2a: Participation in the Citizens' Parliament

In practice, participation in the CP unfolded as a dynamic process shaped by deliberation, self-regulation, and facilitation, revealing how citizens enacted democratic engagement.

Post-CP interviews revealed that participation was broadly inclusive and perceived by participants as equal. Citizens consistently noted that each participant had the opportunity to express themselves, and that mutual respect and equality were maintained throughout the process and were key features of interaction: *"I really liked that we were so respectful towards one another and that we listened to each other."* (post-CP interview, participant 3, female)

Although collective decisions were made through majority voting, minority opinions were acknowledged and respected. Such dynamics suggest that participation was predominantly performed through deliberation and mutual negotiation, reflecting the intended democratic nature of the CP.

Participants themselves took active responsibility for fostering inclusive and balanced participation. Many described efforts to ensure that all voices were heard, even when opinions diverged significantly. One participant reflected:

> *"I usually speak when I have something to say, otherwise I remain silent. Only when we were in small groups did I sometimes feel that someone wanted to dominate the discussion, as there was no moderator and each time there was a new host. In some moments, it might have been better if one of you from the organising team had stepped in as a moderator. I even took on that role myself at times, because I felt that people were speaking over one another and not really listening to each other."* (post-CP interview, participant 5, female)

Certain participants, often those with more developed argumentative skills or greater expertise in the discussed topics, exercised visible influence during deliberations. As one citizen noted:

> *"I was surprised by how strong and intense one participant's position was when he demanded that the concept of democracy be redefined, together with the entire political system and the electoral process. His argument was so powerful that everyone ended up agreeing with him. I was truly surprised, perhaps precisely because of the strength of his reasoning."* (post-CP interview, participant 1, female)

Although the CP was designed as a horizontal and inclusive deliberative process, such instances reveal how informal power relations can nonetheless emerge and shape the dynamics of participation, affecting whose voices are heard, whose arguments prevail, and ultimately, how collective conclusions are formed.

Nonetheless, dominant individuals did not prevent others from contributing, largely owing to the role of group hosts, who actively moderated the discussions and maintained procedural fairness.

The most frequently mentioned barrier to participation was time. Participants felt that discussions in small groups and with experts were too limited and suggested that an additional CP session would have enhanced deliberation process, especially in respect to finalising proposed demands on media and democracy. Another constraint, mentioned by one participant, concerned the non-anonymous selection and scoring of subtopics. The visibility of choices may have influenced the decisions of others, shaping deliberative equality.

Language barriers among minority group representatives also occasionally limited inclusion, as exemplified by one participant's reflection:

> *"There was a participant from Macedonia who wasn't fully understood, and some people reacted negatively to her opinion. I tried to encourage her to express herself in a way that others could understand, even suggesting that she speaks in English. I wanted to help because I felt sorry for her. She clearly wanted to say something but couldn't find the right words. If the topic had been more sensitive, it could have led to conflict."* (post-CP interview, participant 5, female)

Participation was particularly evident in the sessions dedicated to discussing how participants would communicate and engage with one another (CP1). During these discussions, participants jointly established principles of respectful communication and agreed on norms for constructive dialogue. A considerable amount of deliberation was also devoted to deciding how to formulate and name the group's collective outputs in CP2. After an extended debate, participants agreed to adopt the term "demands", emphasising that the wording should express their role as citizens who actively articulate and put forward requests towards political decision-makers.

Similarly, extensive discussion emerged around the procedure for adopting these demands within the CP. Participants debated whether decisions should be made through full consensus or by a qualified majority (two-thirds or three-quarters). Given the small size of the group, even a single vote could substantially affect the outcome, which led to careful reflection and negotiation on how to ensure procedural fairness and legitimacy.

Maximalist participation

Participation in the CP was deliberately structured to foster maximalist engagement, consistent with Carpentier and Wimmer's (2025, p. 71-72) understanding of participation as a continuum of "participatory intensity" between minimalist and maximalist poles. The design of the CP, particularly through group work and the use of the World Café method, was aimed at redistributing power among participants, encouraging collective decisions, and enabling them to act as co-creators of outputs, e.g. resolutions/demands. Such participatory design aligns with a maximalist logic, which seeks to equalise power relations and extend democratic agency beyond the mere expression of opinion.

Post-CP evaluations further reflect these maximalist dimensions. Participants were given the opportunity to express dissenting views even after resolutions had been adopted, and their feedback was formally incorporated into the final outputs. Before each vote, participants presented and discussed their proposals, ensuring that deliberation preceded decision-making. In one notable case, a participant who initially opposed a resolution presented the arguments so persuasively that the group decided to re-open the vote, where in the subsequent round, the resolution was rejected. This case demonstrates both deliberative openness and participants' capacity to influence collective outcomes, which are key markers of maximalist participation.

The deliberative process also facilitated individual empowerment and reflexivity. As one participant reflected:

> *"I realised that many people disagree with the state of the media in Slovenia, and that even those without theoretical knowledge can intuitively recognise good and bad journalism. I used*

> *to think that analysing the media required a lot of theoretical background, but now I see that this may not always be necessary. Just like with art, we can appreciate it even without knowing all its history."* (post-CP interview, participant 1, female)

This reflection illustrates a deepened sense of competence and self-recognition among participants, corresponding to the maximalist notion of participation as transformative and enabling.

Another participant described the process as inherently democratic and worthy of institutionalisation:

> *"It was interesting to observe how we came from different backgrounds, and during the voting one really had to have the courage to state their opinion. It was also interesting to watch how participants reacted. I think this kind of process should become a regular practice. Public consultations on laws could be done this way, especially at the local level."* (post-CP interview, participant 5, female)

This account resonates with Carpentier and Wimmer's argument that maximalist participation extends democracy beyond formal institutions, embedding it into everyday communicative and decision-making practices (2025, p. 14).

Similarly, another respondent emphasised inclusivity as a central value:

> *"We should not neglect anyone. This interaction among us enriched us all, even if only for a small group and a few days. We realised that no one should be ignored, because even people you think are detached from certain issues often turn out to share common ground."* (post-CP interview, participant 2, male)

Such reflections demonstrate the core principle of maximalist participation: democratic equality is realised through respectful dialogue and continuous mutual learning among participants.

Minimalist participation

However, the CP also exhibited instances of minimalist participation, where facilitation and procedural control limited the extent of citizens' autonomy. This reflects the lower level of participatory intensity, in which participants remain included but have limited opportunities to share or exercise power. For instance, during later CP sessions, moderators pre-selected group hosts to prevent dominant individuals from assuming leadership roles repeatedly, ensuring balanced representation. While this intervention enhanced fairness, it also introduced a degree of external control, illustrating how minimalist mechanisms can coexist within an otherwise maximalist framework.

Minimalist tendencies were also visible in decision-making about public representation, when participants were asked to vote on who would present the group's demands at national and European events. Although the moderators established a clear and structured voting procedure to ensure inclusivity, this very process already reflected a form of minimalist participation, as it relied on predefined rules and top-down facilitation rather than on collective decisions. Several individuals further expressed reluctance to participate in the voting, suggesting instead that the organisers or moderators should choose the representatives. Comments such as *"let the lead organiser decide"* (transcript, CP4) illustrate how some participants preferred to delegate decision-making authority rather than exercise it directly. This tendency corresponds to what

Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, p. 12) describe as minimalist participation: a mode of engagement focused on representation and delegation of power rather than active involvement in decision-making. The episode thus highlights that even within a participatory setting, citizens may revert to more passive forms of engagement when faced with responsibility for collective representation.

The reliance on a pre-established script and time-bound schedule further reinforced minimalist participation. Participants generally appreciated this structure, viewing it as necessary for achieving results: the scripted framework ensured focus, discipline, and a sense of accomplishment. As one participant noted, the process's success depended precisely on its structured design, suggesting that procedural order supported, rather than undermined, the experience of meaningful engagement.

In conclusion, participation in the CP shifted between maximalist and minimalist intensities, with facilitation, time constraints, and procedural rules functioning as stabilising elements that made deeper engagement possible. While the process at times limited autonomy, it simultaneously enhanced participants' sense of democratic agency and appreciation of collective deliberation, culminating in a set of demands capable of influencing policymakers and driving tangible changes in media and democracy. In this sense, the CP process exemplifies what Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, p. 72) note: *"It is important to stress that this difference between minimalist and maximalist participation is not a dichotomy, but a dimension, with many in-between positions."* As one participant summarized:

> *"It was definitely well designed, and I think we also did well as a group. We really made an effort and did not ignore any issues. We genuinely tried to find meaningful solutions and hope that, over time, something will come out of this."* (post-CP interview, participant 2, male).

SRQ2b: Construction of democracy in the Citizens' Parliament

At a normative level, participants consistently associated democracy with mutual respect, equality, and the principle that every voice should be heard. This understanding was evident from the very beginning of the CP process, when participants were asked what democracy meant to them, where they pointed out "*freedom of expression*", "*cooperation in social life*" and "*equality*" (CP1, transcription). Their responses resonated with the idea – articulated by Bass (2005, as cited in Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025) – of democracy as a political community grounded in equality among its members. The strength of this belief became particularly clear during a discussion in which one participant suggested that a meritocratic system might be more effective, given that some individuals possess greater expertise on certain topics. This proposal, however, was met with resistance from others, one of which firmly asserted that:

> *"Look, I wouldn't say there would be more democracy (if we implement meritocracy) than there already is, I'd almost say even less, because that goes against the very contradiction inherent in democracy as the rule of the people and the voice of the people, and so on, right? So, your idea of the rule of the wise, well, that's meritocracy, yes."* (transcript, CP4)

Such statements underscore the participants' commitment to the foundational democratic ideal of political equality and highlight a recurring theme that emerged throughout the CP process – the exploration and articulation of ways in which citizens can be more directly involved in existing decision-making structures.

In regard to this, participants also expressed more critical reflections on the current state of democracy, arguing that what we are witnessing today no longer aligns with mentioned ideals due to the growing influence of capital and political elites. This perception resonates with Giddens's (2002, as cited in Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025) observation that, while democracy appears to be expanding globally, established democracies are experiencing increasing disaffection toward representative processes. On this note, one participant stated, "*Democracy is a fraud*," with another continuing in a similar vein, arguing that democracy and state governance do not function effectively and that, for him, democracy now "*simply represents authority*" (CP1, observer notes). This position was emphasised during the CP process as well as in one of the post-CP interviews.

> *"I mean, the fact is that what we have now as democracy is not democracy, because not every voice is heard equally, since there are certain marginal groups that have difficulty being heard; on paper they may even have some rights, but when it comes to enforcing them, compared to other people, those other people interpret it in their own way."* (post-CP interview, participant 2, male)

> *"I primarily understand democracy as an effective model of governance that serves the interests of the majority. That should be its purpose. At the same time, we must unfortunately acknowledge that today democracy practically no longer functions anywhere. In my opinion, what we have today, even in Slovenia, no longer deserves to be called democracy, although politics frequently invokes the term. A much more appropriate term would be partitocracy, since our politics no longer operate in the interest of the majority, but primarily in the interest of political parties themselves and of capital."* (transcript, CP1)

In light of this, participants expressed scepticism toward parliamentary parties and highlighted that they primarily pursue the goals of capital and economic interests rather than the interests of broader society. As one participant noted:

> *"Our politics no longer operate in the interest of the majority, but primarily in the interest of political parties themselves and capital."* (transcript, CP1)

Another participant echoed this sentiment: *"In other words, capital directs politics, gives the instructions."* (transcript, CP4). Through deliberation, the CP participants articulated a collective demand aimed at addressing these concerns:

> *"Legislation should be amended to limit the dominance of political parties in the electoral system, for example, by making preferential voting mandatory."* (CP resolutions/demands)

The demand reflected a broader aspiration to strengthen participatory mechanisms within the existing representative framework. Many participants viewed political parties as a threat to democracy, advocating instead for the expansion of direct democratic elements within the representative system directly engaging with the tension between representation and participation that constitutes one of the central struggles in the history of democracy (Carpentier, 2025, p. 11). In this vein, within CP1, participants also called for the decentralisation of the state through the establishment of regional governance structures, emphasising the redistribution of power toward local communities and citizens. These proposed reforms, though aimed at enhancing participation, depend on legislative action, thereby positioning the state as the principal actor in realizing democratic transformation.

Besides distrust in liberal democracy as one of the potential threats to the democratic system, participants also identified citizens' nonparticipation as a concern. The central argument was that democracy is not functioning effectively also because citizens are not sufficiently engaged. Nonparticipation was framed as both a threat and a challenge, closely linked to broader feelings of distrust and disappointment in liberal democracy. This perspective highlights a perceived need for mechanisms that actively engage citizens and foster meaningful participation in democratic processes. As one participant put it:

> *"If we want democracy to work, we must participate – it requires structure, and we each have to be actively involved."* (transcript, CP1)

Participants often referred to the role of education in supporting democratic processes and thought creatively about ways in which participation (primarily in the context of media, but also more broadly) could be fostered through different strategies tailored to specific age groups, from youth to the elderly. In an insightful exchange, participants jokingly suggested that there could even be a segment dedicated to education about democracy in clubs and event venues stating "*can you imagine if we were in a club at a certain hour, and the DJ says – now, 10 minutes for democracy!"* (transcript, CP4). In the final set of demands, this sentiment was more formally expressed through an emphasis on developing media literacy content in schools that supports critical thinking and creativity, as well as implementing special awareness programs outside the formal education system. While these demands were not explicitly focused on education about democracy, they nonetheless indicate that the CP participants placed great value on education and knowledge which constitutes a crucial component of democracy (Carpentier, 2017, p. 25), a point that aligns with Flores's (2014, p. 113 as cited in Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025) claim that "the lack of education is", as it was already pointed out, "one of the obstacles for democracy and a pending matter if we are truly committed to it".

Additionally, many interviewees in the post-CP interviews emphasised that they perceived the CP methodology as a valuable instrument for fostering citizen participation (thereby contributing to the deepening of democracy and the enhancement of democratic practices). This perception is closely tied to the notion of expanding democratic processes to promote a more substantial and continuous form of participation, one that transcends the materially limited act of electing institutional representatives. Rather than conceiving democracy as confined to periodic electoral engagement, participants underscored the importance of sustained involvement in deliberative and decision-making processes. Several interviewees also expressed a willingness to engage in similar initiatives to CP, addressing issues beyond the domains of media and democracy, motivated by a growing sense of empowerment that participatory democratic processes can facilitate. As one participant articulated:

> *"We all wanted to contribute something ourselves, to make a change. We received, during the CP, confirmation that we are strong together and that we can change something for the better, for everyone." (feedback survey, CP1)*

From a more ideological perspective on how democratic processes should function, two dominant ideological positions emerged among participants in the CP process. The first, which received the most support and is reflected in several of the group's final demands, represents an interventionist ideological approach that views the state as a crucial actor in supporting and

sustaining democratic processes. An example of this position is the following proposal from participants:

> *"Through regulation, public influence and participation should be ensured in the media in order to guarantee pluralism in the representation of voices and interests."* (observers' notes, CP1)

However, this position was consistently challenged during the CP process by one participant who expressed a strongly libertarian perspective. This view regards the collective decision-making inherent in democracy (and the privileged role often assigned to the state) as a potential threat to individual freedoms and to the capacity for voluntary social relations, while also seeking to preserve (and expand) capitalist economic relations (Karsten & Beckman, 2012, as cited in Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025). An illustration of this stance can be found in the participant's remark:

> *"(…) such measures could have counterproductive effects that might be exploited by the 'wrong actors' for their own interests."* (observers' notes, CP2)

While the earlier observations could be described as contestation within democracy, the following threat can be described as external (Keane, 2020, p. 11 as cited in Carpentier & Wimmer, 2025). During the CP, participants often referred to so called "small dictators" or authoritarian leaders.

> *"(Small dictators) relate to how, well, I'd say, more or less ordinary people who have these little dictators inside them come to power, and then it grows into Trumpism"* (transcript, CP3)

When discussing these issues, participants primarily referred to political leaders such as Putin and Zelensky. One participant also mentioned Israel, another Trump, however, the group did not elaborate on how they perceived the consequences of such figures or contexts for democracy but did however mentioned them as having negative influences on democratic processes and society in general. One participant suggested potential ways to address these challenges, emphasising the role of the media. He argued that the media should devote greater attention to presenting the backgrounds of political candidates, linking this to his earlier comment about "little dictators." By revealing the personal and political histories of those contesting electoral positions, he suggested it would be easier to identify potential autocratic tendencies.

> *"That way, we could more easily spot tendencies indicating who might turn out to be such a little dictator."* (observers' notes, CP3)

In conclusion, the CP process demonstrates that participants hold a strongly normative understanding of democracy, grounded in political equality, mutual respect, and the principle that every voice should be heard. These ideals were consistently defended during deliberation, particularly in moments of disagreement, underscoring a shared commitment to democracy as a collective practice rather than a meritocratic or elite-driven system. At the same time, participants expressed dissatisfaction with the functioning of contemporary liberal democracy, which they perceived as increasingly dominated by political parties, capital, and elite interests. To address this, they articulated demands aimed at straightening direct democracy, primarily through the expansion of participatory mechanisms within the representative system. Participants also identified citizen non-participation as a significant challenge to democracy. In

response, they emphasised the importance of education, media literacy, and deliberative spaces as conditions for meaningful democratic participation. The CP methodology itself was widely perceived as empowering, reinforcing the value of sustained, participatory engagement beyond periodic elections. Overall, the findings suggest that participants conceive democracy as an ongoing and contested process that requires continuous participation, institutional adaptation, and active engagement beyond electoral politics.

SRQ2c: Construction of media in the Citizens' Parliament

In the CP process, the media were conceptualised as a core element of the democratic public sphere, central to sustaining informed citizenship, pluralism, and accountability. Participants articulated a vision of the media not as a neutral market actor, but as a public infrastructure essential for democracy's functioning and legitimacy. Citizens understood the media as a fundamental component of the public sphere, whose proper functioning requires continuous state intervention through regulation and sanctions.

Deliberations revealed a shared understanding that market self-regulation is insufficient to ensure ethical, transparent, and socially responsible media practice. Several citizens stressed that legal mechanisms should explicitly bind both public and private media to their social obligations, as evident in this observation:

> *"Participant believes that both public and private media need to be regulated. He thinks that self-regulation is not enough. Every media outlet should adopt an ethical code, and this should be made transparent."* (observers' notes, CP1).

These reflections construct the media not merely as communicative actors but as institutions of public accountability whose legitimacy derives from their ethical integrity and social responsibility.

Building on this perspective, participants proposed in the demands that the media should be granted a special legal status that would distinguish them from ordinary economic entities. As one participant reporting on the group deliberation said:

> *"Then we came to another additional idea, that a new type of company should actually be established, called a media company, which would mean that all media would have a completely special status in the Slovenian economic space. That they must operate in the public interest, that they must be socially responsible, that they are transparent."* (transcript, CP2)

The proposal to establish such special status of media companies reflected an effort to inscribe social responsibility, transparency, and public interest directly into the structural and legal foundations of the media system. As citizen put it, this would *"cut through this media madness"* (transcript, CP2) by resetting the rules of operation and separating media performance from purely commercial imperatives. Citizens' insistence on redefining the legal identity of media organisations can be read as an attempt to restore the balance between market logic and democratic function.

A key theme in the CP debates was the demand for transparency in media ownership, funding, and operations, which citizens identified as both a precondition for trust and a mechanism of public accountability.

> *"The first thing we wrote down was the transparency of operations. That means in the acquisition and use of funds. It is clear that we expect these funds to be used for socially relevant content, not for reality shows and so on."* (transcript, CP2).

Another participant echoed this concern, emphasising that *"at the moment, we don't know how the money is being spent"* and thus highlighting *"the need for stricter oversight of the use of financial resources in media companies."* (observers' notes, CP2).

Such statements illustrate a structural understanding of accountability. Citizens did not see transparency as a voluntary practice but as a regulatory necessity, a means to ensure that financial resources, especially public ones, serve democratic rather than commercial ends.

These reflections translated into a set of explicit demands. Participants called on the responsible Ministry *"to tighten the regulation of media content and the sanctions for violations of media legislation"*, to *"create a legal framework that will make media owners accountable for the ethical integrity of published content"* and to *"establish rules to increase the transparency of media operations and financing."* (CP resolutions/demands) Transparency, they insisted, should include clarity about *"the sources of funding, the way funds are allocated, and the assurance that funds are used for the production of socially relevant content."* Furthermore, they demanded that *"state authorities carry out stricter oversight of media ownership concentration"* and *"that a single regulatory body be established for all types of media."* (CP resolutions/demands) Together, these demands demonstrate an interventionist orientation, seeking to institutionalise the public function of the media through regulatory mechanisms.

However, an articulated dissenting opinion was present, cautioning that:

> *"In tightening regulation and introducing sanctions, restraint is necessary, except in certain cases, since such measures can have both positive and negative consequences and may be misused to serve particular interests instead of the common good."* (transcript, CP1)

This divergence shows the tension between the need to safeguard media's public responsibility and the risk of regulatory capture, where control mechanisms might themselves become instruments of political or economic domination.

The discussions also revealed how citizens understood the economic and political struggles shaping the media landscape. Participants recurrently emphasised that *"media are supposed to be free, apolitical, and impartial, but the problem lies in who finances them."* (observers' notes, CP1). Another participant identified ownership and capital as the roots of distortion:

> *"Participant states firmly that politics and the media are in the pocket of capital, and that this is the root of everything; a renewal of the socio-political and economic system is needed, along with strict regulation of capitalism as we know it today."* (observers' notes, CP2).

Similar views were shared across several sessions: *"As everywhere in Europe, capital runs the media and politics."* and "*The media are not free because of the pressures of capital and politics."* (observers' notes, CP4). Another participant summarised the problem bluntly:

> *"Many people are not sufficiently aware that the media have become just another factory, meant by most owners solely to make profit."* (post-CP interview, participant 4, male).

In response to these struggles and threats, citizens called for stronger material and institutional guarantees for the media's independence and sustainability. In the CP resolutions/demands they urged the state to:

> *"legally ensure dedicated funding for media organisations to enable the regular and sustainable employment of a sufficient number of qualified journalists", and "provide dedicated funding for the production of content that addresses socially relevant topics in a high-quality and responsible manner."* (CP resolutions/demands)

In addition, the state should *"promote internal (employee) ownership of media organisations"*, thereby redistributing ownership and decision-making power within newsrooms.

When discussing content regulation, participants maintained that the state has a legitimate role in restricting socially harmful communication. They agreed that any harmful content should be sanctioned but also stressed that such interventions should aim to protect the integrity of public discourse, not to impose ideological control.

When constructing the media as a subject of self-regulation and ethical accountability, citizens proposed that the law should strengthen the role of the Journalists' honorary tribunal by requiring courts to consider its decisions in legal proceedings:

> *"The law should grant greater authority to the decisions of the Journalists' honorary tribunal by ensuring that courts take its decisions into account in their proceedings."* (CP resolutions/demands)

This proposal was further clarified in the presentation of demands by one participant:

> *"Let me just add that what we meant was that right now, the Journalists' honorary tribunal issues a ruling, but that's basically it. You can't prosecute a journalist who did something wrong, so it should be legally regulated that such a ruling serves as a basis for further legal proceedings."* (transcript, CP2)

This reflects a vision of strengthened institutional authority for self-regulatory bodies, linking ethical rulings with judicial processes.

Furthermore, participants stressed that self-regulation must be grounded in a unified ethical framework. As expressed in the deliberations:

> *"I mean some kind of ethical code that would apply to all media, not that each outlet would have its own. And within every media company, there should also be some kind of business ethics too."* (transcript, CP1)

They also called for a legal and ethical obligation requiring media outlets to inform users about complaint mechanisms, framing media accountability as a shared responsibility of both the state and the media industry.

Finally, participants stressed that media owners should bear direct ethical responsibility for the content and conduct of their outlets. In one of the CP resolutions they explicitly demanded that:

> *"The responsible Ministry should create a legal framework making media owners accountable for the ethical integrity of published content."* (CP resolutions/demands)

Taken together, these reflections and demands demonstrate how citizens expanded the concept of accountability beyond journalists and editors to include owners and institutional governance structures.

The digital sphere introduced further complexity to this debate. Citizens discussed possible frameworks for governing online platforms, including an innovative proposal to introduce digital certificates for user verification and accountability, identified as "values-protected participation". Yet, after extensive deliberation, this idea was rejected due to technical reasons and fear of misuse of the certification process to restrict participation instead of regulating it. This reveals citizens' awareness of how governance of digital platforms can reproduce existing power asymmetries.

Finally, the question of trust in media emerged as a central political and moral concern. One participant summarised the sentiment shared across multiple groups in the CP process:

> *"It is very important, this trust in the media, which simply does not exist… now the question is how the media can regain our trust, and we are talking here about reporting on socially important issues."* (transcript, CP1).

This call to rebuild public confidence in the media reflects the recognition that trust is not merely a psychological or cultural issue but a structural one, dependent on transparency, ethical journalism, and participatory governance.

In conclusion, the CP discussions positioned the media as a public democratic infrastructure, a cornerstone of the public sphere whose capacity to serve democracy depends on structural guarantees rather than market dynamics. The citizens' reflections and demands consistently constructed the media as a subject of state regulation, expressing the necessity of an interventionist role of the state in ensuring media accountability, transparency, and social responsibility. Their vision challenged the dominance of profit-driven and politically influenced media systems, arguing that only through clear regulatory frameworks, sanctions for violations, and public funding mechanisms can the media maintain independence and legitimacy. At the same time, participants recognised the persistent economic and political pressures – from ownership concentration to the market power and influence of media owners, encompassing both economic and political agendas – that distort the media's democratic role. Consequently, their emphasis on transparency of funding, ownership, and content production reflects an understanding that trust in the media cannot be rebuilt without systemic reform. The CP process thus articulated a collective call for the reconstitution of the media as a public good: transparent, ethically grounded, and democratically governed, sustained through active regulation and societal oversight rather than left to the logics of market self-regulation.

6.5 Short concluding reflection

The CP process illustrated the potential and democratic value of participatory practices, revealing how citizens can enact maximalist forms of participation when supported by inclusive procedures, sufficient time, and effective facilitation. Within such conditions, citizens demonstrated their capacity for informed deliberation and co-creation of collective outcomes (resolutions/demands). The participatory process enabled citizens not only to discuss policy issues and elaborate demands for policy reform, but to experience democracy as a lived and

shared practice – an enactment of civic equality and mutual responsibility. This participatory ethos resonates with Slovenia's historical tradition of collective responsibility and participatory governance, rooted in the Yugoslav socialist model of self-management, and remains reflected in the contemporary legal framework for local self-government, including provisions for local citizens' assemblies and participatory budgeting.

The citizens' strong support for state interventionism and expectation that the state should act as a "protector" of the public good through regulation, sanctions, and financial support resonates with legalism and normative approach reflected in extensive regulation of sectors (e.g. four laws directly regulate media) and of long-standing prominence of the public sector in Slovenia, particularly in education, healthcare, and social welfare. Slovenia's relatively low income, wealth, and wage inequality, reflected in one of the lowest Gini coefficients in the European Union (SURS, 2025), also provides a social context for the CP's participatory dynamics and demands. It reinforces citizens' expectations of fairness, solidarity, and collective responsibility, values evident in their deliberations and preference for inclusive, state-supported democratic governance of the media.

The citizens' demands for media policy measures oriented in state interventionism and social responsibility therefore cannot be reduced to a merely instrumental or strategic preference. It can be seen as reflecting a deeper historical and normative legacy rooted in the socialist experience, which cultivated values of solidarity, collective welfare, and social responsibility. This perspective has persisted to prevail into the democratic era after Slovenia's independence, reinforced by the predominance of centre-left governments through the past 34 years. However, the citizens' aspirations for a media system grounded in social responsibility, inclusive representation that gives affected communities a voice, and participatory ownership may also reflect the ideological profile of the majority of participants, who, according to the pre-CP screening questionnaire, tended to position themselves toward the left of the political spectrum.

Many participants reported a sense of empowerment and competence, realising that complex political issues, such as media regulation, could be discussed meaningfully by ordinary citizens. Equality, respect, and mutual listening were not abstract principles but guiding norms of interaction, allowing participants to feel genuine ownership of the process and its outcomes.

For participants, the process fostered not only democratic empowerment but also social learning. Many described feeling enriched by dialogue across diverse viewpoints, realising the value of inclusion and respect in democratic debate. This collective experience strengthened trust in participation and deliberation as a legitimate means of decision-making. As several participants suggested, such participatory formats could be institutionalised as regular consultative mechanisms within policymaking. The participatory process also generated a hope for practical impact of the CP – to influence policymakers and foster a more participatory democratic culture at all levels.

In this sense, the CP exemplified how democracy can be both performed and reimagined through citizen participation. It offered participants a tangible sense of agency, reaffirmed Slovenia's cultural commitment to social responsibility, and demonstrated that citizens, when given space, information, and respect, can meaningfully contribute to shaping the democratic agenda.

PART III:
COMPARATIVE ANALYSES

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7 Comparative analysis on Research question 1

Research question 1: How do the citizen parliament participants in the four countries envision the democratic roles of media in their recommendations / resolutions for future perspectives and in the processes leading to these recommendations?

Secondary Research Question:

d) How are the CPs' imaginaries of the media's democratic roles similar and different in the four countries against the background of their respective political agendas?

Overview: Envisioning and prioritising media's democratic roles in the Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy

Building on an understanding of the five main roles that media should fulfil in democratic societies, as identified in the theoretical framework of Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, pp. 52-64), research question 1 seeks to map how the citizens in the four countries envisioned these roles in their deliberations, and how they addressed them in their drafted and adopted resolutions for the future of democratic media in Europe.

Across the four Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy in Austria, the Czech Republic, Ireland, and Slovenia, a striking similarity emerges in how citizens prioritized the democratic roles of media, with the *informational*, *representational*, and *participatory* roles consistently taking centre stage. This prioritisation was, to a degree, shaped by the structure of the deliberative process of the CPs, as "representation in the media" and "participation in and through the media" had been predetermined as two of the three main topics that the citizens should develop resolutions on. Consequently, as two full days were devoted to them, the representational and participatory roles were consistently among the most articulated roles in all four countries. The *representational* role was linked to a shared emphasis on media's duty to reflect social diversity and ensure visibility for marginalized groups. The *participatory* role was similarly highly valued, and often linked to community media, safe online participation and media literacy as a central precondition of participation.

Likewise, the *informational* role proved to be foundational in the citizens' understanding of media's responsibility in democratic societies to provide accurate, balanced, and socially relevant information, and was therefore strongly prioritized, especially in Austria, Slovenia and the Czech Republic. In Ireland, the informational role was almost taken for granted by citizens and thus featured less in their deliberations and resolutions.

The *watchdog* and *forum* roles, by contrast, received notably less attention in all four countries, though with varying nuances. The *watchdog* role was often perceived as a normative given or an inherent component of journalistic reporting in a functioning democratic society rather than a subject of active debate. Slovenian citizens often subsumed its key features – such as ethical standards, in-depth reporting, and avoidance of sensationalism – within their expectations of the informational role. While the importance of investigative journalism was recognised in Ireland, the Czech Republic, and to a lesser degree in Slovenia, this key facet of the watchdog role was largely absent from the discussions in the Austrian CP.

The *forum* role, which concerns the media's capacity to foster public dialogue, was almost entirely absent in Slovenia and received only limited, indirect attention in the other countries, typically through its overlap with participatory functions. The forum role was most strongly articulated in Ireland, connected to the idea of media as a facilitator of the public sphere, in line with their watchdog role.

While none of the democratic roles of media, as identified by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025), were omitted entirely in the deliberations and resolutions of the Citizens' Parliaments, the emerging patterns of prioritisation suggest that, while citizens across the four countries value media's role in exposing wrongdoing and facilitating debate, these functions are either taken for granted or seen as secondary to the more immediate imperatives of information provision, representation, and participation. The hierarchy of roles that emerges thus reflects both the design of the Citizens' Parliaments and a shared vision of media as socially responsible, inclusive, and educational pillars of democracy.

The commonalities and differences that can be observed in the four countries also reveal how the five democratic roles of media are often intertwined in the imaginaries of European citizens, resulting in similar issues being associated with different roles in the four national research reports. Media literacy especially emerged as a common emphasis in all four national CPs, but while this theme was connected to the facilitation of participation (both in and through the media) in Austria, Ireland and Slovenia, the Czech analysis identifies it as an issue connected to the informational role, by highlighting its aim of combating disinformation. Given the prominence of this theme in the deliberations of the citizens, the Irish analysis goes as far as suggesting identifying a separate educational role of the media connected to media literacy and democracy education.

In the following comparative and aggregated analysis of the imaginaries of the five democratic roles of media, as identified by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025), in the Citizens' Parliaments, notable intersections between roles are always considered where they emerged in and across the countries.

The informational role: Informing citizens

Across the four Citizens' Parliaments, citizens consistently emphasise the core principles of accuracy, objectivity, and impartiality as foundational to the informational role of media in democracy. In all four countries, there is a strong belief that media must provide fact-based, balanced, and socially relevant information to enable citizens to make informed decisions and participate meaningfully in public life. Slovenian participants, in particular, describe media as a "public good", akin to education and healthcare, with a responsibility to serve the public interest above commercial or partisan goals.

Likewise, citizens in all four counties agree on the importance of protecting quality standards of journalism, with a shared concern about a potential decline of quality journalism often attributed to financial pressures and the rise of digital platforms, which lead to more misinformation and sensationalistic reporting. In Ireland and Austria, ensuring compliance with journalistic standards was mainly seen as a responsibility of media regulation. While the Irish citizens clearly looked to their state regulator for enforcing these standards, the deliberations

in the Austrian CP revealed a tension between advocates for state regulation and self-regulation and also suggested to establish journalistic standards at a European level.

The specific challenges and solutions concerning the informational role that the citizens prioritize in the four CPs reflect their unique political and media landscapes. In Austria, a focus was on transparency and quality criteria, with citizens advocating for media to disclose the funding they receive and to more clearly distinguish between facts and opinion in their reporting.

The Irish and Slovenian citizens share a conviction of journalism to have an ethical responsibility for ensuring truthfulness and fairness in their reporting. The Irish CP stands out here by not only demanding accuracy and impartiality but by also calling for mechanisms to correct past inaccuracies, especially in ensuring fair representation of marginalized groups.

The Czech CP places particular emphasis on protecting journalists and local media, with resolutions targeting legal protections against SLAPP lawsuits and ensuring access to public information on a local and regional level. The Czech Citizens' Parliament also underscores the importance of media literacy as a shield against disinformation, reflecting a proactive stance on both supply side (journalistic standards) and demand side (audience education).

Slovenian participants, on the other hand, advocate for a more participatory agenda-setting, calling for opportunities of civil society to influence media priorities. They also emphasise the need for more comprehensive coverage of community life, science, and education and for more global and contextualized reporting, critiquing the current national focus of Slovenian media.

The watchdog role: Controlling power holders

Across the four Citizens' Parliaments, the watchdog role of media was universally recognized as essential to democracy, yet its articulation and prioritization vary. Both in Ireland and Austria, the watchdog role was connected to the importance of media as the "fourth estate", but in Austria this articulation remained largely implicit, framing media's fulfilment of the watchdog role as a hallmark of a functioning democracy. Austrian citizens expressed gratitude for living in a country where media still act as a watchdog, contrasting their situation with countries where media freedom is perceived to be under threat. Their focus here is on supporting independent journalism abroad, rather than on concrete mechanisms or challenges at home. Irish citizens, on the other hand, framed the watchdog role more explicitly in terms of media's responsibility to act as their "eyes and ears," fact-checking information and holding power to account. They expressed particular concern over the decline of investigative journalism, attributing it to under-resourcing and the pressures of immediacy characterizing the news environments of digital platforms, and proposed concrete solutions such as a universal basic wage for journalists to safeguard this function.

Similarly, in Slovenia, the watchdog role is acknowledged as crucial for exposing misconduct and authoritarian tendencies, which the citizens termed "small dictators". The citizens, however, grappled with the boundaries and practical application of this function in their discussions, revealing a tension between media's corrective power and the risk of overreach. Generally, the analysis of the Slovenian CP suggests that the function of the watchdog role is strongly tied to citizens' expectations of the informational role of media, regarding ethical standards or balanced and in-depth reporting.

The Czech citizens, meanwhile, pointed to the lack of regional investigative journalism and the challenges citizens face in getting their voices heard in townhall newspapers. Their discussions underscored the need for both professional investigative journalism and citizen participation in social monitoring. This theme of citizen participation in social monitoring was also recognized by the Irish citizens, connected with their call for media to provide a "townhall" type of public forum for holding politicians in power to account. In the Irish CP, the role of media as a watchdog was thus intertwined with their role of facilitating a forum for democratic debate, as discussed under the forum role below.

The forum role: Facilitating societal debate and democratic struggle

The forum role as a means to facilitate public debate was generally less recognised by citizens across the four countries. While all Citizens' Parliaments propose some type of public forum enabled by the media, these are imagined in different ways. In Ireland, the forum role is most explicitly developed, with citizens calling for regular, structured regional forums facilitated by media stakeholders that bring together the public and elected officials. The Irish approach is notable for its "town hall" format that connects the forum role with the watchdog role of media with a clear expectation that media should act as an ally in holding politicians to account, bridging the gap between the public and elected officials.

In Austria, the forum role is framed primarily as a responsibility of public service media to provide a "discussion forum" on socially relevant topics, with a strong emphasis on journalistic curation to prevent misinformation and ensure fact-based debate. The Austrian citizens also reflected on the possibilities and constraints of the online environment to provide the traditional forum role of media and highlight the need to regulate digital platforms and adapt algorithms to prevent echo chambers.

Comparable approaches to the forum role are taken in the Czech Republic and Slovenia, where citizens explored the ideas of an "audience forum" or "public editorial meetings" respectively, which would allow citizens to influence media content. The Czech citizens, in particular, focused on ensuring representation of diverse social groups and principles of deliberative democracy in these forums, but they also raised concerns over the inclusion of extremist voices – an issue that was also addressed in the Austrian CP by calling for a careful "invitation policy" in the proposed discussion forums by the public service broadcaster.

While the forum role is articulated differently across the four countries, in each context there is a common objective to enhance democratic participation by citizens with a shared understanding that media should provide spaces for diverse citizens' voices and perspectives to be heard – whether aimed at holding politicians to account, being involved in editorial decisions or debating socially relevant topics.

The representational role: Representing the pluriformity of the social and the political

Across the four Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy, citizens shared a fundamental commitment to the idea that media should reflect the diversity of society and accurately represent social plurality (e.g., regarding gender, ethnicity, class and region). In all four countries, there was a strong consensus that media must actively include underrepresented and

marginalized groups, not only in content but also in editorial teams and decision-making processes.

The Austrian, Irish and Slovenian Citizens' Parliaments emphasise the importance of inclusion and self-representation, with Slovenia adopting the principle "Nothing about any social group without that group". A similar principle is the Irish emphasis on representation "Of people and for people". The Austrian CP particularly highlights the role of community media to enable minority self-representation, which is connected to the participatory role of community media, as also recognized by the Irish citizens.

Recognizing that diversity in media production leads to more nuanced and fair representation in content, all Citizens' Parliaments stressed the need for diversity in journalistic profiles and editorial teams, with Austrian and Slovenian citizens discussing systemic and institutional solutions, such as legal quotas or incentives for minority hiring.

Another common thread is the recognition of structural barriers that hinder equitable representation. Citizens across all four countries acknowledged that systemic issues – such as gender roles, class discrimination, and media structures – limit who gets to speak and how they are portrayed. The Slovenian, Czech and Irish discussions, in particular, highlight how stereotypes, dehumanizing framing and cultural biases shape media narratives, often reinforcing negative perceptions of minorities. The Austrian CP is notable in considering the limits of representation, debating whether media should reflect the exact demographic distribution of society or if some groups might prefer non-representation to avoid stigmatization. The Austrian citizens also explored the concrete ways diversity in journalist identities, media content and media audiences affect one another. Their approach can be seen as pragmatic, balancing a normative ideal with practical considerations.

Apart from the representation of ethnic minorities, which were emphasised in all countries, Slovenia was particularly concerned with ensuring gender balance and visibility of women. Slovenian citizens also pointed to the underrepresentation of working-class perspectives, while in Austria, citizens were highlighting the common lack of representation of local or regional culture and perspectives in mainstream media, which they want media to remedy.

While all countries strongly associated the representational role of media with inclusion and the representation of the full diversity of society, the representation of the political, which is identified by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, p. 61) as a distinct – though intersecting – dimension of the representational role, features less prominently in the discussions of the Citizens' Parliaments. In the Austrian and Irish CPs, this aspect of representing political plurality is mostly connected to the fair and balanced representation of a diversity of political opinions, which – in the case of Austria – intersects with the forum role and was related to a protection of basic democratic values.

The Austrian CP also stands out for calling on especially public service media to fulfil an educational role by representing democratic processes. This aspect of civic education is also recognized by the Irish CP, where it is discussed under the aspect of facilitating participation in democracy through the media. In a slightly different angle, the Czech citizens want representation to encompass a "political imagination" of social change.

The participatory role: Facilitating public participation

Across the four countries, citizens share a fundamental belief that media should actively facilitate and expand public participation, both in the media sphere and in democratic life – corresponding to the two strands of participation *in* the media and *through* the media as differentiated by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, p. 62).

A common theme for facilitating more participation in the media across the Citizens' Parliaments is the support for community media and local media as vital platforms for participating in the media. Citizens in Austria, the Czech Republic, and Ireland advocate for increased funding and resources for non-commercial community media, seeing them as essential for amplifying diverse voices and fostering local engagement.

Another commonly emphasised theme is the importance of media literacy as a cornerstone for facilitating meaningful participation – both in the media and in social democratic life more general, bridging the two aspects of participation *in* and *through* the media. The Austrian, Slovenian, and Irish Citizens' Parliaments, in particular, focused on media literacy and media education as a precondition for participation and call for systematic media education – from early childhood through adulthood – to empower people of all generations to navigate media landscapes, identify misinformation, and engage constructively in public debate. Fostering critical thinking through media literacy, which can act as a shield against disinformation, was also emphasised in the Czech CP, where it related to the informational role of media.

Recognizing that citizens need both the skills to critically engage with media and the opportunities to contribute to media content and decision-making, the Irish CP discussed these two forms of media education as "media literacy" and "capacity building for media agency". The analysis of the Irish CP identified them as such a strong theme in their deliberations and resolutions that it warrants to assign them to a distinct educational role of the media.

Apart from media literacy initiatives, Irish and Austrian citizens suggest additional measures to safeguard users, especially children and vulnerable adults, from harm related to participation on digital platforms. Both the Irish and Austrian CP call for EU-level regulation of algorithms on digital platforms, as has been discussed under the forum role above. Other suggested measures of the Irish CP include delayed posting options, while the Austrian citizens advocate for mandatory moderation of content on digital platforms.

Ireland particularly stands out for prioritizing a paternalistic approach to protection and regulation connected to participation in the media. The Irish analysis notes an interesting manifestation of the intersection between the participatory and representational role here: While most of the deliberations and resolutions of the Irish citizens on "representation in the media" were actually connected to enabling participation (and self-representation), their deliberations and resolutions on "participation" were more focused on protection and education than on expanding participatory structures.

While all four Citizens' Parliaments agree that media must do more to enable public participation, their specific priorities reflect distinct national contexts and levels of trust in media, civil society, and the state. In Austria, there is a particular concern about barriers to participation, such as language barriers, financial constraints, and regional disadvantages. Austrian citizens propose innovative models like donated media subscriptions ("media

sospeso"), public access points for quality media, AI-based translation tools, and outreach media projects to ensure access and participation for disadvantaged groups.

The Austrian CP also most directly addresses media's role in facilitating political participation on a wider scale – what Carpentier and Wimmer (2025, p. 62) capture under participation *through* the media. Austrian citizens see it as a responsibility of the media to counter widespread distrust and non-participation in institutionalized politics in the population (e.g. non-voting) by communicating the importance and merits of political participation.

The Czech CP, on the other hand, places a strong emphasis on building capacity and knowledge-sharing within the media ecosystem. Czech participants advocate for state-supported training programs to diversify the pool of journalists and contributors, and for cross-media synergies to enrich the media landscape. Their vision is notably collaborative, focusing on mentoring, skill-sharing, and citizen journalism.

Another concern that is shared by both the Czech and the Slovenian CP is ensuring greater transparency and citizen participation in media self-regulatory mechanisms, like with media councils (Czech Republic) or a national media ombudsman (Slovenia). As was discussed under the forum role, both countries also advocate for more citizens' participation in influencing media agendas – which the Slovenian CP, in particular, proposes as a participatory measure in the form of public editorial meetings. The Slovenian vision is notably maximalist here, advocating for ongoing, institutionalized dialogue between media with the public and civil society, while respecting editorial independence. This approach treats participation as a civic right and media as a public good, that should enable and sustain participatory structures.

8 Comparative analysis on Research question 2

Research Question 2: How are democracy and media constructed in the participatory process of the four citizen parliaments?

Secondary Research Question:

d) What are the similarities and differences between the four countries in terms of their performance of participation and their constructions of democracy and media?

Overview: Constructions of democracy and media in the Citizens' Parliaments

While research question 1 explored the ways citizens in the four Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy in Austria, the Czech Republic, Ireland and Slovenia envisioned the future for how European media should fulfil their democratic roles in their deliberations and resolutions, research question 2 focuses on the participatory process in the Citizens' Parliaments and how democracy and media were constructed and enacted by the citizens in them.

As the four Citizens' Parliaments were implemented with a common design and shared principles, e.g. regarding the recruitment of a diverse panel of citizens and the use of a common basic structure and facilitation method (Art of Hosting), the basic conditions for citizens' participation were similar across the four countries. The exact way the participants in each CP conducted themselves as individuals and as a group, and on what issues they decided to deliberate together, however, remained largely in their hands. The analyses of how the citizens in each country performed participation and enacted democracy thus reveal both shared commitments and experiences as well as distinct national nuances.

Across all four countries, the CPs functioned as spaces for maximalist participation, where citizens could actively shape and co-create a deliberative and dialogic process. Participants in each context valued the opportunity to engage directly in a democratic process, often contrasting these experiences with the limitations of the models of liberal and representative democracy they experience in their own national contexts, which was especially pronounced in Austria and Slovenia. But even the Irish citizens, who expressed the highest level of satisfaction with the model of representative democracy, appreciated the collective practice of democratic interaction. The CPs were explicitly framed as sites for "doing democracy," where respectful deliberation, consensus-building and the recognition of minority opinions were central. Across all four countries, the Citizens' Parliaments themselves emerged as good-practice examples for citizen participation, which the citizens advocated to implement on a broader scale as models for deliberative and direct democracy. The analysis of the participatory process of the CPs thus reveals the potential of deepening democratic engagement through participatory innovation.

In the four national analyses, the participatory process in the Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy emerged both as a deliberative process of constructive dialogue and mutual learning, structured by different participatory intensities as well as in-group power dynamics, as well as a cooperative and outcome-oriented process of democratic decision-making in producing and adopting resolutions. While these two aspects of the participatory process are discussed in the same section on the performance of participation (SRQ2a) in the national reports of Austria and Slovenia, they are separated in the Czech and Irish analyses, which

discuss the second aspect of enacting democracy as part of the discussion on SRQ2b, together with citizens' discursive constructions of democracy on a societal level. Additionally, some aspects connected to consensus building, power relations and collaboration within the participatory process of the CP were also encompassed by SRQ1b and SRQ1c. Thus, the incorporation of these aspects in the discussion of research question 2 varied between the national research reports. In the following aggregated and comparative analysis, these variations are bridged by extracting the main themes pertaining to the performance of participation and the enactments of democracy across the four national analyses independent of their provenance within the national research reports and comparing their commonalities and differences.

Image 7: The parliamentarians in the Czech citizen parliament voting (Prague, 17 May 2025). Photo credit: The Czech citizen parliament organisational team

A similar approach is taken to comparing the discursive constructions of democracy and media and the identified political struggles and threats in the four Citizens' Parliaments. The comparative analysis does not attempt to capture all national nuances of how media and democracy are constructed in each of the four Citizens' Parliaments; rather, it summarises the main commonalities and differences. To a large extent, the citizens' discursive constructions of media and democracy build on the discussions of media's democratic roles under research question 1 (SRQ1a and SRQ1b). Media are universally constructed as essential to a healthy democracy by the citizens across the four countries – as a core public democratic infrastructure fulfilling the role as "fourth estate", as facilitators of the public sphere, or as a "public good". At the same time, media are constructed as sites of political struggles, faced with challenging technological, political and economic developments that jeopardize their democratic potential. The comparative analysis reveals common priorities and notable differences in the way the four Citizens' Parliaments conceive the intersection of democracy and media.

Performance of participation in the Citizens' Parliaments

The participants across the four Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy in Austria, the Czech Republic, Ireland and Slovenia consistently experienced the participatory process of the Citizens' Parliaments as a collaborative democratic process that was enabled both by the deliberative structure and support of the facilitators, as well as by the common commitment of all involved citizens and how they performed participation and achieved collaboration together.

The design of all Citizens' Parliaments, as developed by the WP6 partners and adapted to each national context, was based on the principles of participatory democracy and Participatory Action Research, with an emphasis on enabling inclusion and equality between a diverse panel of participants. The CP structure aimed at facilitating a structured and cyclical process of mutual learning, reflection and deliberation, involving group activities and plenary settings and enabling the collaborative development of output in the form of resolutions.

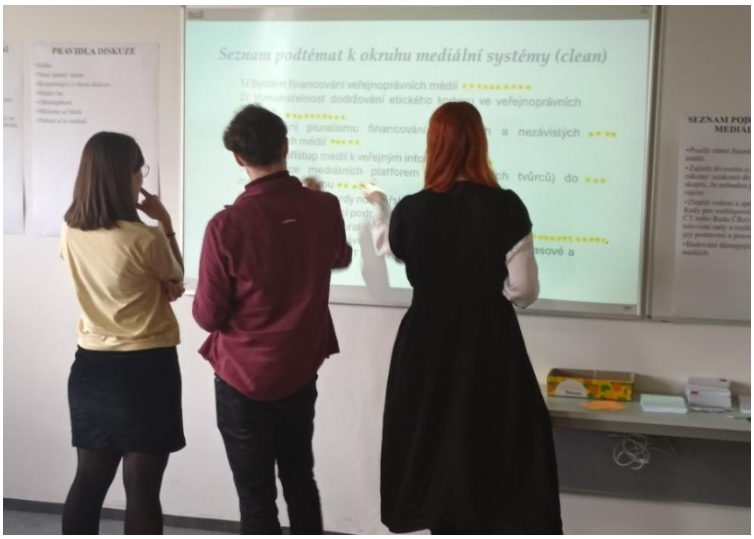

Image 8: Parliamentarians deciding on the 'media systems' subtopics (dot-voting) in the Czech citizen parliament (Olomouc, 5 April 2025). Photo credit: The Czech citizen parliament organisational team

Although citizens were not involved in designing the CP itself, which could be seen as restricting their participatory autonomy and maximalist participation possibilities, national analyses show that participants generally appreciated the pre-set structure and support from facilitators, which they felt enabled the CP process to succeed and lead to the desired outcome of resolutions. This was especially observed in the Slovenian report. Moreover, the research teams and facilitators in all countries made efforts to adjust procedures to the needs of participants, e.g. in response to the online feedback surveys after each CP session, as noted by the Czech and Austrian reports. At times, the citizens questioned or showed resistance to structures and decisions by the facilitators. In Austria, for example, this concerned raising questions about the composition of the committees, while the Irish citizens went as far as changing the structure of the CP themselves, delaying their vote on resolutions until the next session (see below). In the Irish case, the facilitators actively stepped back, allowing the citizens to take ownership of the process.

The Citizens' Parliaments thus enabled enhanced and maximalist forms of participation, which were structured by common conditions in all four countries, including respectful dialogue, self-monitoring and in-group management as well as deliberation based on argument and mutual negotiation and learning. At the beginning of the first CP session, the participants of each CP agreed on their own set of rules of conduct, which the Irish citizens referred to as "The Rules of Engagement". Many of these principles or rules proved to be similar across the four countries, such as respectful communication, active listening, equal and balanced participation and respect for minority voices. Some national specificities can be observed, like the imperative of no phone use and the introduction of a "speaking stick" in Ireland to actively encourage other participants to speak, a rule on raising hands to speak in Slovenia, the emphasis on timekeeping in the Czech Republic, or the valuing of humour in the interactions between participants in Austria.

These self-determined rules proved to be an important condition for enabling the collaborative process, as participants in all national CPs frequently referred back to these rules and self-monitored their compliance with them, for example when tensions arose. In-group support was also observed in all CPs, with participants actively enabling and encouraging equal participation by all, for example by addressing silent participants and asking for their opinion. While minor tensions or frustrations over diverging opinions or structural challenges experienced in the CP process were occasionally observed across all four Citizens' Parliaments, disrupting conflicts seldom occurred. These were usually resolved by the participants themselves; the Austrian report highlighting some instances where the facilitators stepped in as mediators.

Image 9: The rules of conduct of the Austrian Citizens' Parliament (Vienna, 22 March 2025). Photo credit: COMMIT

Limitations to maximalist participation observed across the four national CPs were commonly related to informal power relations and group dynamics. The Austrian and Slovenian analyses, for example noted some gender and age-related dynamics, with male and older people tending to dominate some group discussions. Language barriers for migrant participants were also a factor in the Slovenian CP, restricting their ability to participate fully. Different participatory intensities were also observed in all CPs, with some participants being more vocal and displaying more active types of participation, while others appeared to be more reserved or

frequently stayed silent. However, the national analyses caution against equating dominance or restraint with a higher or lower level of participation. Both the Irish and Austrian reports highlight occasions where less vocal participants made meaningful contributions, participating as much as they themselves chose.

More minimalist types of participation were also related to the delegation of responsibility in all Citizens' Parliaments, which both concerned in-group delegation (e.g. choosing group moderators/"table hosts" or CP representatives for public presentations) and out-group delegation (e.g. delegation of decision-making to the facilitators/organisers). These two types of delegation of responsibility were sometimes intertwined: In Slovenia, for example, some participants showed a preference for the facilitators to decide on who to select as representatives for the national and European presentations of the CP results. In Slovenia, facilitators and moderators also sometimes intervened to balance power asymmetries in representative roles, which included assigning the role of group-host to specific participants to foster balanced participation. Meanwhile, in Austria, a balance in different group roles (moderators, presenters, spokesperson) was managed organically by the citizens themselves, with only few participants consistently dominating.

Enactment of democracy in the Citizens' Parliaments

As with the rules of conduct set by the citizens at the beginning of the CP process, the citizens were also responsible for selecting and agreeing on their decision-making procedures for developing and adopting resolutions together. While all CPs sought to balance the aim of reaching consensus with respecting minority opinions, the mechanisms they chose to achieve this varied.

Image 10: The rules of decision-making in the Czech citizen parliament (Olomouc, 5 April 2025). Photo credit: The Czech citizen parliament organisational team

Both Slovenia and the Czech Republic chose majority voting in the form of public votes (in the case of the Czech Republic with enhanced majority based on 2/3 of the vote), with the possibility of abstention beside Yes/No votes, which could influence the ultimate outcome. While for the Czech citizens the choice of decision-making procedure was sometimes experienced as a pressure for consensus that could lead to silence from dissenters, the

Slovenian experience was marked by more explicit political contestation, especially in later sessions, where participants felt increasingly empowered to voice dissent, leading to more rejected or heavily abstained resolutions (which the Slovenians decided to call "demands").

Irish citizens chose a secret ballot (equally with the possibility of abstention), which created a safe space for open debate and gave citizens the option to change their minds between the phases of deliberation and formal voting, but ultimately lead to everyone respecting the majority outcome. The Irish procedure of voting on resolutions also stood out by mirroring procedures of parliamentary democracy in Ireland – e.g. by conducting a formal parliamentary session in a different setting than the small group deliberations and choosing one of the facilitators to act as the "Speaker of the house" (Ceann Comhairle) to maintain order.

Finally, Austria opted for a consent-based model, where resolutions were adopted unless they received more than three vetoes, which allowed for both majority support and the expression of minority dissent and affirmation. Similar to the experiences in the Czech CP, this model could lead to people refraining from raising a veto and resolutions to be passed without receiving a lot of affirmative votes.

Austria also differed from the other three countries by developing resolutions in committees rather than in the rotating World Café setting chosen by the CPs in Ireland, Slovenia and the Czech Republic. One unintended consequence of this structure was observed in the emerging of a slight competitive thinking between the committees in the Austrian CP (whose composition varied between the sessions and was determined by the research team), connected to how many resolutions they managed to draft. On the other hand, the applied consent method of decision-making relied on all participants trusting in the output of the other committees. By contrast, the World Café method used in the other countries, in which participants rotated between tables when drafting resolutions, enabled them to contribute actively to a greater number of resolutions. This enabled a wider variety of perspectives to be incorporated and helped to build collective understanding.

Image 11: The citizens in the Austrian Citizens' Parliament decide on the resolutions on participation through dot voting (Vienna, 26 April 2025). Photo credit: COMMIT

It is interesting to relate the effects of these differences in the structure of the group work and the decision-making methods to the output of the Citizens' Parliaments, i.e. the number of resolutions adopted. Unlike in Slovenia and the Czech Republic, where not all proposed resolutions over the three relevant parliamentary sessions were ultimately adopted, the Irish and Austrian CPs rejected no resolution. The highest level of consensus was reached in Ireland, with most resolutions receiving an over 80% majority approval, while in the Austrian CP, which adopted the highest number of resolutions out of the four Citizens' Parliaments, only five resolutions were left with vetoes – but below the threshold of rejection – at the end of the sessions.

Besides these differences, the deliberative and collaborative process of drafting and adopting resolutions was characterised by similar concerns in all four Citizens' Parliaments, stemming from the outcome-oriented mentality displayed by all citizens. As participants had been recruited through an open call and selection process, they all presented themselves as being very committed to contributing to the development of demands and recommendations to be brought to relevant decision-makers in policy and the media, with the aim of achieving tangible impacts for the future. Common struggles that emerged as recurring themes in the development of resolutions in all four CPs were thus a tension between idealism and feasibility or pragmatism; perceived limitations in the citizens' expertise and knowledge; and struggles with different approaches to formulating resolutions (e.g. whether they were perceived by some participants as too general/vague or specific or as lacking clear definitions of terms).

To overcome some of these struggles, the Austrian and Irish citizens relied on the support of the facilitators to develop a template for how their resolutions should be formulated, incorporating both the issue in question, the concrete demand or recommendation and the addressee. Both the Austrian and Slovenian citizens were especially keen to identify the concrete addressees that would implement their demands, and in both countries, the research teams reviewed and revised their adopted resolutions in terms of language and consistency, which was appreciated by the participants as a mechanism of quality assurance that relieved them of some pressure during the process of drafting resolutions.

A common struggle impacting the development of resolutions across all four countries was related to the ever-present time constraints of each CP session. In the Czech CP, for example, this led to frequent expressions of frustration over the imperfect output of the resolutions. Meanwhile, the Irish citizens stand out for countering the time constraints by resisting the devised structure of the research team, collectively agreeing on delaying the vote until the beginning of the next parliamentary session and forming a drafting committee to continue working on the wording of the resolutions between sessions.

In conclusion, the four Citizens' Parliaments reveal both the strengths and challenges of deliberative democratic processes. All emphasised collaboration, striving for consensus, and respecting minority views, but differed in how they balanced idealism with pragmatism, and how much autonomy citizens took over the process or how much they relied on the structure and guidance provided by the facilitators. The role of the facilitators was pivotal – whether they stepped back to empower citizens or intervened to ensure inclusion – and the structure of the CPs shaped not only the outcomes but also how citizens experienced democracy in action. Successful processes were achieved when allowing for both robust deliberation and flexible adaptation, enabling citizens to feel heard, respected, and effective in their democratic practice.

Image 12: The parliamentarians at work during a world café session in the Czech citizen parliament (Prague, 15 March 2025). Photo credit: The Czech citizen parliament organisational team

Constructions of democracy in the Citizens' Parliaments

Across the four national Citizens' Parliaments, citizens' understandings of democracy reveal a shared commitment to equal rights and opportunities for participation and representation of all people, and the protection of core democratic values, but with notable differences in emphasis and interpretation. The Austrian, Czech and Slovenian participants articulate democracy as a living practice, one that requires constant engagement and critical reflection, and that should extend beyond periodic elections to include direct citizen involvement in decision-making. The Austrian and Slovenian citizens, in particular, express dissatisfaction with the liberal and representative democracy as it currently functions, with Austrians calling for more instruments of direct democracy and Slovenians critiquing the dominance of political elites and capital. The Czech citizens similarly advocate for enhanced participation, not just in formal politics but in civil society and local governance, and stress the importance of pluralism, respect, and inclusivity. In contrast, Irish participants, while valuing the principles of freedom, fairness, and autonomy, tend to accept representative democracy as the norm, though they also express a desire for greater public involvement and accountability. A key commonality is the belief that democracy is not a static system but a dynamic process that depends on active citizenship, education, and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.

The political struggles and threats for democracy identified by citizens across the four countries reflect both shared concerns and distinct national contexts. All four Citizens' Parliaments highlight the erosion of trust in democratic institutions and the growing influence of political and economic elites as major threats. Austrian and Slovenian participants are particularly alarmed by authoritarian tendencies and the centralization of power, pointing to examples of Hungary, Turkey, and the US, and calling for stronger safeguards against democratic backsliding. Czech citizens echo these concerns, emphasising the risks of over-regulation, corruption, and the lack of pluralism in governance and media. Irish participants, while less focused on external threats like the far right, are deeply concerned about disengagement from politics, the decline of respect for politicians, and the manipulative power of digital platforms

and algorithms. Slovenian citizens see capital and political parties as opposing the interests of the broader society, and advocate for decentralization and regional governance to counter these trends. Across all contexts, there is a shared recognition that citizen apathy and non-participation are significant internal threats, undermining the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic systems.

A notable divergence is in how citizens propose to address these threats. Austrian and Slovenian participants advocate for structural reforms, such as expanding instruments of direct and deliberative democracy, decentralizing power, and strengthening media literacy and civic education. The Slovenian CP goes further, calling for legal and institutional changes to ensure media transparency and accountability, and to limit the influence of capital and political elites. Czech citizens, while also supporting participatory reforms, are cautious about state overreach, reflecting historical sensitivities to excessive control. They emphasise the need for autonomy in civil society and media, and for a culture of democratic engagement that goes beyond formal institutions. Irish participants, in contrast, place greater faith in existing structures, calling for better enforcement of regulations and more resources for oversight bodies, but without fundamentally challenging the representative system. Their focus is on protecting citizens from misinformation and ensuring ethical behaviour in media and politics. This reflects a strong protectionist stance held by most of the Irish citizens, which was only occasionally countered by concerns for individual freedom. A clash between interventionist and libertarian ideological positions, especially concerning media regulation by the state, was a cross-cutting theme across all four CPs, with Slovenia and Ireland being most strongly interventionist in their demands.

Finally, the role of education and media literacy emerges as a cross-cutting solution in all four countries, but with different nuances. Austrian and Slovenian participants see media education and democracy education as essential for critical thinking and informed participation, and propose integrating it into schools and a variety of contexts of adult education. Czech citizens advocate for education for active citizenship, with the aim of promoting civic engagement and democratic culture, while Irish participants focus on protecting citizens from digital manipulation and ensuring access to reliable information. Overall, while the specific perspectives on struggles and threats and the proposed remedies vary, the four Citizens' Parliaments share a vision of democracy as a fragile, evolving system that requires vigilant protection, active participation, and continuous adaptation to new challenges.

Constructions of media in the Citizens' Parliaments

Across the four national Citizens' Parliaments, citizens' constructions of media reveal both shared understandings and distinct national emphases. The citizens' understanding of media can be usefully related to and compared through the four concepts identified by the Czech national report, following from the common theoretical framework (see section 3.3): Media as *institutions*, as *public sphere*, as *public good*, as *industry* and as *technology*.

Across all four countries, citizens consistently framed media as a vital, albeit challenged democratic *institution*, emphasising their essential role in democracy as the "fourth estate". Slovenians went even further, calling for a special legal status for media to separate them from purely commercial entities. In the Czech Republic, Austria, and Slovenia, media were seen as institutions under threat from declining public trust, political interference, and commercial pressures. Czech and Austrian citizens highlighted the need for state support in the form of

regulation and funding but were concerned with ensuring media's independence from too much political state influence, advocating for transparency about funding criteria and the reliance on experts or other intermediaries for administer the support or the funding decisions. Slovenian citizens were likewise concerned with transparency in funding, positioning media as institutions of public accountability. In Ireland, on the other hand, media were viewed as allies of citizens, with a strong focus on their democratic roles, but less emphasis on institutional reform compared to Slovenia or the Czech Republic.

The construction of media as facilitators of the *public sphere* was likewise common across all Citizens' Parliaments. Citizens in all four countries recognize the three different sectors of media – public service (PSM), commercial and non-commercial community media, with the Austrian Citizens' Parliament particularly emphasising the importance of a pluralistic media landscape that meets the needs of all citizens. The Austrian and Czech citizens both stressed the integrative role of public service media (PSM), while Slovenians proposed institutionalizing public interest through regulatory mechanisms and sanctions. The non-commercial community media sector was widely acclaimed for ensuring inclusive participation and representation, especially in Austria and Ireland, although it had not been well known to many of the citizens prior to coming to the Citizens' Parliament. The Czech citizens particularly advocated for a stronger cooperation between PSM with regional and community media to fulfil its public service remit of representing social diversity. In Austria and the Czech Republic, the widespread erosion of trust in media is attributed to media's failure to represent regional and societal diversity.

Expanding on the consistent construction of media as vital democratic institutions and facilitators of the public sphere, media are also commonly referred to as a *"public good"*, characterized by their normative responsibilities and commitments to serve the public interest. This conception of media as a public good was particularly prominent in Slovenia, where citizens linked media to other pillars of a democratic society, such as education or healthcare. The Czech CP emphasised the media's role as providers of education and culture, which does not only have an informational and participatory component, but also an aesthetic dimension for people's lives.

When constructing media as an *industry*, all four countries identified economic pressures, ownership concentration, and declining working conditions for journalists as key issues. Czech and Slovenian participants were particularly vocal about the risks of media ownership by wealthy individuals or corporations, demanding more transparency about ownership structures and advocating for comprehensive legal reforms to ensure media's public accountability and ethical integrity. Austrian and Irish citizens focused on the tension between commercial interests and journalistic standards, with the Irish CP linking commercial interests to a tendency of "lazy reporting". The Austrian CP particularly critiqued the common practice of low-quality tabloid media receiving public financing through advertising revenues.

Media as *platforms or technology* were mostly discussed in Austria and Ireland, often in connection with questions of trust and challenging technological developments. Austrian participants grappled with the blurring lines between traditional and digital media, debating whether social media platforms or individual accounts with significant reach should be considered "media" and thus subject to journalistic standards. The Austrian citizens identified a generational divide in media perception, with older generations relying more on traditional

media than younger generations that are more familiar with digital media. Still, the Austrian citizens also identified challenges and dangers of the digital media environment, with a particular concern for the impact of digital platforms on attention spans and democratic discourse, especially for children and young adults. Similarly, Irish citizens, while trusting "legacy" media (print and broadcast), were deeply concerned about digital platforms' impact on public discourse, calling for stricter regulation of social media platforms to protect users. Both Austria and Ireland call for EU-level regulation of digital platforms to address these issues. While the Slovenian and Czech citizens were also in favour of regulating digital platforms, acknowledging the challenges of disinformation and the need for media education, the Czech CP stands out for suggesting that social media platforms can also be used as a democratic tool.

In conclusion, the political struggles and threats for media identified by citizens across the four countries converge around several core issues: the erosion of trust, the influence of commercial and political interests, and the challenges posed by digital platforms. Despite their national differences, a shared concern unites all four Citizens' Parliaments: the belief that the democratic roles of media are under threat from commercial pressures, political interference, and the unchecked power of digital platforms, and that only through a combination of regulation, transparency, and public engagement media can reclaim their legitimacy as pillars of democracy.

Image 13: The parliamentarians in the Irish Citizens' Parliaments learn about media and participation from the MeDeMAP training video with Nico Carpentier and Andrea Miconi (Limerick, 10 May 2025). Photo credit: Mary Immaculate College

9 Conclusions and recommendations

Within the framework of the MeDeMAP project, Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy in Austria, the Czech Republic Ireland and Slovenia worked on possible ways to strengthen the pro-democratic roles of media in our democracies. In each country, 20 citizens – representing a wide range of ages and diverse social backgrounds – supported by experts and professional facilitators, have drafted and adopted in total 133 resolutions to highlight in which ways media can better contribute to strengthening democracy. These resolutions are based on and have been analysed before the background of the theoretical framework developed by Carpentier and Wimmer (2025), "Democracy and Media in Europe. A Discursive-Material Approach". They present a "Future roadmap for European media and democracy", the results of which can be of interest to a wide variety of stakeholders in the areas of media research, media policy, educational policy, media (self-)regulation, journalism, media literacy and the wider civil society interested in the facilitation of participatory processes.

Image 14: Preparing to vote in the Czech citizen parliament (Brno, 26 April 2025). Photo credit: The Czech citizen parliament organisational team

Media policy is a field of conflict, as it sometimes entails negotiating conflicting positions of political power and economic interests of media owners. The democratic needs of citizens risk to stay behind these interests of economic and political actors. Working together in the Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy enabled all involved citizens to engage in an in-depth learning and decision-making process, resulting in outcomes that went beyond conventional "Realpolitik". Guided by the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), the researchers have ensured that cooperation and exchange between the citizens took place on an equal footing.

Citizens understood that media are not just sources of news but essential pillars of democracy that require active citizen engagement to function well. Participants came to the conclusion that media literacy, inclusive representation, and opportunities for public participation are key to ensuring that media serve the public interest. Democratic media depend on collaboration, transparency, and context-specific solutions, and citizens themselves have the power to shape

media's roles in society. As a consequence, democracy needs informed, engaged citizens – and media must empower them. Based on the results and the process of the Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy, the following key points for further discussion can be formulated:

- **Media as a public good**: Citizens across all four countries came to recognize media not just as a source of information, but as a public good that must serve the public interest above commercial or partisan goals. This shift in perspective underscored the need for media to be more inclusive, transparent, and accountable to society.
- **Power of participation**: Participants recognized that meaningful democratic engagement requires both access to information and opportunities for active participation. The deliberations highlighted the importance of community media, safe online spaces, and structured forums for public dialogue. Citizens realized that media literacy – understood as the ability to critically engage with media – is a prerequisite for both informed decision-making and constructive participation in public life.
- **Interconnectedness of media's democratic roles:** The process revealed how the five democratic roles of media – informational, representational, participatory, watchdog, and forum-role – are deeply interconnected. For example, accurate information (informational role) is essential for holding power to account (watchdog role), while diverse representation (representational role) fosters inclusive participation (participatory role). Citizens saw that these roles cannot be addressed in isolation but must be strengthened collectively to support democracy.
- **Challenges and solutions are context-specific:** While shared values emerged, the Citizens' Parliaments were also aware that the challenges facing media and democracy – such as misinformation, underrepresentation, and declining trust – manifest differently in each country. This led to context-specific resolutions, like the focus on transparency and regional representation in Austria, the call for structured public forums in Ireland, advocacy for participatory editorial meetings in Slovenia or to protect independence of public service media through inflation-adjusted fees in the Czech Republic.
- **Empowerment through deliberation:** The deliberative process of the Citizens' Parliaments itself was a learning experience. Citizens discovered the value of collaborative decision-making and the importance of diverse perspectives in shaping media policies. Many left with a stronger sense of agency, understanding that their voices and actions can influence how media function in society. The overall process revealed the strength of participatory innovation in empowering citizens and generating tangible policy recommendations.

Recommendations

The experience gained in the Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy can serve as an incentive to involve citizens more often and on an equal footing in both policy-making and research. In total 133 resolutions haven been voted by the Citizens' Parliaments which can be found in Appendix A of this report. Based on the work of the Citizens' Parliaments, the following summary recommendations for media policy can be derived:

Strengthening the informational role: ensuring quality, transparency, and independence

Citizens across all four countries emphasise the foundational importance of accurate, balanced, and socially relevant information. Media policy should prioritize:

Support for quality journalism: Establish European and national funds to subsidize investigative and local journalism, especially in regions where media outlets face financial pressures. This could include upgrading of media councils as actors in self-regulation but also tax incentives for media organizations that adhere to high journalistic standards and public interest reporting.

Transparency and accountability: Mandate clear disclosure of media funding sources and ownership structures and require a strict separation between factual reporting and opinion. Media should be treated as a "public good" and public service media should be further insulated from commercial and political interference.

Protection for journalists: Adopt legal protections against SLAPP lawsuits and ensure access to public information. This should be complemented by EU-wide mechanisms to safeguard journalists from harassment and political pressure.

Enhancing representation and participation: inclusivity and empowerment

The strong emphasis on representation and participation in all four countries points to the need for policies that:

Promote diversity in media content and staffing: Introduce quotas or incentives for hiring journalists from underrepresented groups, and support training programs to diversify the media workforce. Media councils should monitor and report on diversity in both content and employment.

Expand community and local media: Increase funding and resources for non-commercial, community-based media (on national and EU level), which are seen as vital for amplifying marginalized voices and fostering local engagement.

Institutionalize participatory structures: Establish regular public forums, editorial meetings, and media councils with citizen participation. These structures should be designed to influence media agendas and ensure accountability, while respecting editorial independence.

Media literacy and digital safeguards: empowering citizens

The universal call for media literacy for all generations as a precondition for participation and a shield against disinformation requires:

Systematic media education: Integrate media literacy into school curricula and adult education programs. This should include media analysis, critical thinking and fact-checking, connected with democratic citizenship skills.

Regulation of digital platforms: Implement EU-level regulations to ensure algorithmic transparency, prevent echo chambers, and protect users – especially children and vulnerable groups – from harm. This could include mandatory content moderation and "delayed posting" options.

Watchdog and forum roles: strengthening accountability and public debate

While the watchdog and forum roles were less emphasised by the Citizens' Parliaments, their importance for democratic health demands:

Support for investigative journalism: Create dedicated funds and legal protections for investigative reporting, particularly at the regional and local level. This could include a "universal basic wage" for journalists in precarious conditions.

Public forums and deliberative spaces: Media should be incentivized to host regular, structured public forums – both online and offline – to facilitate debate and hold power to account. These forums should be inclusive, moderated, and connected to decision-making processes.

Cross-national collaboration and European standards

The shared values and distinct national priorities revealed in the Citizens' Parliaments suggest the need for both tailored and harmonized approaches for:

European media standards: Develop common standards for media independence, transparency, and public service obligations, while allowing for national adaptation. This could include a European Media Ombudsman or a network of national media councils with citizen participation. The specific role of non-profit community media should be taken into account in the further development and implementation of the European Freedom Act (EMFA) and other relevant regulatory instruments.

Knowledge exchange and best practices: Facilitate cross-border collaboration among media organizations, civil society, and policymakers to share innovative models (e.g. participatory agenda-setting) and address common challenges like disinformation and media capture.

These recommendations reflect a vision of media as a public good, central to democratic life and responsive to the needs and aspirations of citizens. By addressing the informational, representational, and participatory roles in a coordinated way – while also reinforcing the watchdog and forum functions – media policy can help realize the democratic imaginaries articulated in the Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy. The next steps could be to pilot some of these recommendations in collaboration with media organizations, civil society, and policymakers, and to evaluate their impact on media trust, participation, and democratic resilience.

At the same time, as the Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy have demonstrated their transformative potential as models for deepening democratic engagement, citizens' Parliaments on a wide range of topics should be supported in all EU countries and across the EU and should become a natural part of democracy research.

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APPENDIX

A. The Resolutions of the Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy

The 133 resolutions of all four Citizens' Parliaments on Media and Democracy have been compiled in this appendix from the respective national resolutions reports, published by the WP6 partners. It should be noted that the national resolutions reports, which are cited and linked below for each country, include additional contextual information on the process of the respective citizens' parliament and in some cases also commentaries on the resolutions, which have not been included in this compilation.

A.1 Czech Republic

Source: Resolutions Report of the Czech Citizen Parliament on Media and Democracy. Prague: Culture and Communication Research Centre (CULCORC), Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, 2025. https://medemap.fsv.cuni.cz/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/CZ_CP_ResolutionsReport_EN.pdf

Resolutions - Media Systems

Subtopic I: Ensuring diversity and pluralism through media laws

Resolution 1: Media concentration rule: A media house must be owned by a joint-stock company with various entities as shareholders

Resolution 2: Adopt measures against oligopolies and monopolies in the media sector

Resolution 3: Creation of a system (by law) of financing independent, regional and community media

Subtopic II: Improving leadership and administration through councils

Resolution 4: Parliament (both chambers): Mandatory disclosure of information (CV, background, e.g. via online register) about nominees for councils, including who nominated them

Resolution 5: Media experts elect councilors with the aim of depoliticizing the electoral process

Subtopic III: Conditions and standards of journalistic work

Resolution 6: The Parliament of the Czech Republic should approve legislation that will speed up the handling of SLAPP lawsuits against journalists

Resolution 7: The Czech Syndicate of Journalists should / The state will support the establishment of an independent organization that should ensure:
- better union organizing of journalists
- decent salary conditions
- possibility of stable long-term employment contracts
- support for free legal services in case of SLAPP lawsuits

Subtopic IV: Public service media financing system

Resolution 8: Increasing license fees depending on inflation

Resolution 9: Leave the current financing composition of 90-94% license fees and other parts (grants, funds, business (merch))

Resolution 10: License fees should be secured by e.g. constitutional law (3/5 required to abolish)

Subtopic V: Ensuring pluralism of financing of town hall and independent regional media

Resolution 11: Provide more funding for independent regional media, with municipalities spending part of the money (1:1) – to the amount of funds used for town hall newspapers – into a fund designated for independent journalism (NFNZ [Endowment Fund for Independent Journalism], Czech Syndicate of Journalists), thereby supporting the proposal of the Oživení organization

Resolution 12: Increase legal liability and enforceability in the case of abuse of town hall newspapers for political self-promotion

Subtopic VI: Enforceability of compliance with the code of ethics in public service media

Resolution 13: Create an independent body that will not be appointed by the general director and will supervise compliance with the media's code of ethics and will task the director to sanction (the given problem)

Subtopic VII: Integration of media platforms into the media system

Resolution 14: Creation of a legal and ethical framework for digital creators and a system of control and enforcement

Subtopic VIII: Improving media access to public information

Resolution 15: Preventing delays in providing information (sanctions for failure to meet deadlines)

Resolution 16: Capping the amount of payment for obtaining information

Resolutions – Media Representation

Subtopic I: More thorough dramaturgical and editorial work, leading to a more diverse selection of experts and strengthening the voice of people from different social groups

Resolution 1: A position will be created in the public service media that will focus on the initiatives of social groups that do not have enough space in the media, and will ensure their inclusion in the work of the editorial staff.

Resolution 2: Media councils will more consistently promote a more diverse selection of experts in order to ensure a greater plurality of opinions.

Subtopic II: Support for diversity among media content creators: a diverse category of people creates more diverse content

Resolution 3: The Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, in cooperation with an independent organization (e.g. NFNZ), will introduce a scholarship programme for students of media fields from minority groups. It will introduce a grant programme for media to support the creation of job opportunities and mentoring, which will enable minority groups to enter the media industry.

Resolution 4: The Ministry of Culture, in cooperation with an independent professional organization (e.g. NFNZ), will announce a grant programme to support media projects created by creators from regions, minority groups and people with insufficient representation in the media.

Resolution 5: The directors general of public service media will take measures to support the diversity of their teams, set goals, monitor them and publish the results—the boards will oversee their implementation.

Sub-topic III: Supporting diversity of content: topics of minorities, socially disadvantaged and people without a voice (…)

Resolution 6: A periodic open forum will be established, which will collect feedback through discussion on what topics appear in the media. This body will operate on the basis of the principles of deliberative democracy and participants will be selected to represent different social groups.

Resolution 7: NFNZ (Endowment Fund for Independent Journalism) will support the creation of a tool contributing to the equal distribution of media space between experts and representatives of different social groups interested in the topic. Compliance (with the equal distribution of media space) will be positively motivated through the education of journalists and journalistic awards.

Sub-topic IV: Support for media education (literacy)

Resolution 8: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports will regularly announce grants and calls for proposals to support various organizations that provide educators with training and educational materials on current topics of media education.

Resolution 9: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (Czech School Inspection) will more often evaluate the application of cross-cutting topics in the educational process in schools so that it can use the analyses in a society-wide debate on the importance of (among others) media education.

Resolutions – Media Participation

Subtopic I: Support for cooperation between different types of media and organizations (e.g. commercial/public with non-profit media)

Resolution 1: Media councils – in cooperation with editorial offices – will create a platform for transferring professional experience in creating media content to regional and community media (e.g. in the form of exchange programmes, professional guidance, practical guides)

Subtopic II: Media education, teaching the possibilities of civic participation and how to create media content (competences and skills)

Resolution 2: The Ministry of Regional Development/Ministry of Culture will create a grant programme to finance media education for journalists, so that they can acquire practices and ways to engage different groups of citizens.

Subtopic III: Creating space for different social groups to participate in content that is relevant to them

Resolution 3: The state (and relevant ministries) will offer a grant, the recipient of which is the media, which will provide training programmes (e.g. Journalism Simulator organised by the Czech regional media outlet Naše Broumovsko) for interested people from different social groups so that they can become potential external media collaborators.

Subtopic IV: (State) support for local, regional and community media

Resolution 4: The state will support local, regional and community media through subsidies and grants.

Resolution 5: The state will support citizen participation in the creation of media content through subsidies and grants.

Resolution 6: Media established by local governments (municipalities) and regions (city hall, regional news agencies and radio stations) cannot draw funds from the sale of advertisements: this is an effort to set fair conditions so that independent local media are not disadvantaged.

A.2 Austria

Source: Resolutions Report of the Austrian Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy. Vienna: COMMIT – Community Media Institute, 2025.
https://www.commit.at/fileadmin/Materialien/MeDeMap/COMMIT_CPA-Report_A4_EN.pdf

Ensuring the quality of media content

We address: the Austrian Federal Ministry for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport (BMWKMS)

1: Indicator-based media funding: Media funding should be linked to scientifically validated indicators on democracy-enhancing public participation in the media and their evaluation. To this end, we call for the commissioning of a scientific study to define indicators that capture the participation of the population in the media as part of media quality.

2: Strengthening the diversity of content: In the interests of a broader representation of topics, media funding should be linked to the obligation of media to maintain a predefined proportion of 'minority topics' in their overall volume of content.

3: Media education through media funding: If media education is seen as training in the critical consumption of different media, all forms of media funding should be linked to mandatory contributions to media education.

4: Funding for journalist training: Funding for journalist training should be expanded.

5: Promotion of quality journalism: We call for a cap on advertisements from public funds. Public money should be used more for the targeted, transparent and independent promotion of quality journalism.

6: Promotion of quality journalism by the Press Council: Press funding should be linked to membership in the Press Council.

7: Safeguarding quality journalism through the Press Council: The Press Council should be given powers to impose legal and financial sanctions.

8: Restrict funding for free newspapers: Free newspapers that do not practice quality journalism should not receive any funding.

9: Promotion of community media: Access to funding for non-commercial community media should be made easier.

10: Funding for associations of community media: Funding for associations of community media should be expanded so that they can support communities in the production of content.

11: Transparency in the allocation of media funding: We call for the expansion of KommAustria's financial and human resources as an independent media authority. Funding decisions should be shifted from RTR GmbH to KommAustria.

12: Independence in the allocation of media funding: Public funding for media should be allocated by independent expert advisory boards.

13: Strengthen representation in funding advisory boards: The composition of funding advisory boards should be politically independent and professionally competent, and should take into account representation with regard to diversity characteristics, in particular age, gender, sexual orientation, origin, religion, etc.

14: Transparency in the allocation of funding: For more transparency in the allocation of funding, we call for the compilation of publicly accessible accountability reports on media funding, covering the application of award criteria, the funding amounts and those responsible for the decisions. A publicly accessible database should be created where the accountability reports are published.

We address: Media organisations

15: Transparency regarding the allocation of funding in the media: For more transparency regarding the allocation of funding, media companies should publish information on the funding they have received and the funding database at regular intervals.

16: Ensure, improve and make visible the quality of information in the media: The separation of fact-based and opinion-based content (e.g. report and commentary) should be made more clearly identifiable in all media.

17: Promotion of further training for journalists: We call for the increased creation of free further training programmes for journalists (e.g. on the use of plain language).

18: Direct line of communication in EU reporting: We call on Austrian media reporting on the EU to obtain accreditation in Brussels.

We address: the Austrian Press Council

19: Popular initiative on media quality: We call on the Press Council, in consultation with the Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy, to initiate a popular initiative calling for an increase in media quality, to raise awareness of the issue in society.

Promoting participation and access

We address: Municipalities and the Austrian Federal Ministry for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport (BMWKMS)

20: Removing financial barriers by facilitating access to quality media: Quality newspapers should be distributed at municipal offices and other public places, e.g. outdoor swimming pools, pensioners' clubs, doctors' offices. The funds for the purchase of quality newspapers should be provided as part of the quality journalism funding programme, analogous to the existing opportunities for schools to purchase newspapers.

21: Easier access to time-independent use of quality media: We call for the creation of suitable forms of online access to quality newspapers via QR codes, which are made available at municipal offices and other public places, e.g. outdoor swimming pools, pensioners' clubs, doctors' offices. The provision of online newspapers is to be ensured as part of the quality journalism funding programme.

We address: Media organisations

22: Removing financial barriers in the access to media: We call on media companies to offer and advertise 'Medio sospeso', i.e. donated newspaper subscriptions for socially disadvantaged people, analogous to the 'Caffè sospeso' model.

23: Implementation of translation tools for online media: Translation tools for online reporting (e.g. online articles and videos) should be implemented to make journalistic content available for speakers of different languages.

24: Low-threshold (local) opportunities for active participation in the media: We call for the organisation of citizens' forums on local topics and the use of information stands at public events and in public places to actively involve people in the media.

25: Promote political interest: We call on media companies and politically active players to communicate best practice examples of political participation to the public in order to arouse more interest in participation processes.

We address: the Austrian Federal Ministry for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport (BMWKMS)

26: Reduce language barriers: We call for more information programmes, for example news, events and publications in non-German languages (especially in the languages of migrant communities), in simple language and in sign language. Non-commercial media should receive special funding for this purpose and public service media should be obliged to do so.

27: Innovative formats for political journalism: We call for a legal basis to fund creative and innovative formats in the media that present the democratic decision-making process of legislation in a clear and transparent way.

We address: Municipalities and Districts

28: Reducing spatial barriers: We call for the promotion of creative projects for outreach media work in public spaces with a focus on local issues (using the example of Cap Radio's Radio Truck in California).

29: Low-threshold local initiatives to motivate people to participate in politics: We call on municipalities and local civil society organisations to organise citizens' forums on local issues and to use information stands at events and in public places to motivate people to participate in politics.

30: Factual reporting on political topics at municipal level: We call for factual reporting on political topics at municipal level (e.g. on municipal council meetings) in media that are produced or commissioned by the municipality (e.g. on social media platforms, in podcasts, etc.).

We address: the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education (BMB) und the Austrian Federal Ministry for Women, Science and Research (BMFWF)

31: Reduce the ideological 'divide' in society: We call for the promotion of discussion and debating clubs in schools and in adult education with the aim of recognising diversity of opinion as an opportunity.

We address: the Austrian Federal Provinces and the Federal Government

32: Promotion of dialogue spaces: Municipalities should be supported in creating dialogue spaces for citizens (using a drawing by lot) for promoting the critical use of media and public discourse and thus contribute to a 'de-bubbling' in society.

We address: the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF)

33: Provision of discussion spaces in public service media: We call for socially relevant topics to be discussed in prime-time television programmes from a wide range of opinions (e.g. reflection on the Covid measures, need for affordable housing, etc.). We see such programmes as a contribution to strengthening social cohesion. The prerequisites for success would be specially trained presenters and an invitation policy that gives space to different, but always fact-based opinions.

Media education for all

We address: the Austrian Federal Ministry for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport (BMWKMS)

34: Media education in ORF's public service remit: If media education is seen as training in the critical consumption of different media, media education should be firmly anchored in ORF's public service remit, e.g. through a fixed percentage of broadcasting time.

We address: the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education (BMB)

35: Media education in public educational institutions: If media education is seen as training in the critical consumption of different media, media education should be anchored in public educational institutions as early as possible on the educational pathway, for which appropriate resources (personnel, expertise) should be made available.

36: Media centres: We call for the nationwide expansion of funding for leisure educational projects to teach skills and creativity in the media field. The City of Vienna's media centre can serve as a model here.

We address: Institutions and organisations providing general adult education, e.g. adult education centres (VHS)

37: Media literacy courses in adult education: We call for the creation of more low-threshold media literacy courses in different languages. To this end, increased opportunities for cooperation between general adult education institutions (e.g. adult education centres) and civil society organisations (e.g. football clubs, cultural associations, diaspora associations) should be created.

We address: the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF)

38: Funds for media literacy courses: We call for the provision of budget funds to finance multilingual media literacy courses.

Representation and diversity

We address: the Austrian Federal Ministry for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport (BMWKMS)

39: Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in editorial teams: To ensure the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in editorial teams, we call for a legal basis for the mandatory implementation of quota regulations for all non-specialist or non-topic-specific media organisations.

We address: Media organisations

40: Diversity in editorial teams: To fulfil the demand for diversity and plurality in media, the diversity of the population should be reflected in editorial teams. To this end, we call on the media to create appropriate incentive programmes, e.g. internships and training programmes.

41: Making under-represented groups more visible: We call on media organisations to do more community work with under-represented groups (e.g. by actively approaching representatives of the groups, involving them in finding topics, inviting them as conversation partners).

42: Increase diversity among recipients: To strengthen more diverse reporting in the media that also reaches the recipients, the media should present minority issues in such a way that they meet the needs and demands of the groups concerned.

We address: the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF)

43: Strengthen reporting from local communities: We call on ORF to report on local/regional events based on suggestions from the population for at least 8 minutes per day in regional programmes throughout Austria.

44: Representation of the diversity of Austrian society: We call for prime time television programmes in ORF that reflect the diversity of people living in Austria, e.g. respectful documentaries about families/individuals (such as "Alltagsgeschichten") in which representatives from urban/rural areas appear equally.

The European Union and Digital Platforms

We address: the European Commission (EC)

45: Quality assurance of the European media system: We call for a European media system that is based on relevant quality criteria and European values.

46: Support for civil society in EU member states where media freedom is under threat: We call for the creation of a financial framework to support civil society and NGOs in EU member states where media freedom is under threat for the purpose of
– supporting independent journalism
– producing and distributing content in the media
– creating opportunities for exchange with journalists in other EU member states.

47: Taxation of large media and digital platforms: We call for quality-based taxation of large media, including digital platforms, by the EU.

48: Ensure, improve and make visible the quality of information on digital platforms: Digital platforms should be obliged to disclose their algorithms and to label content created by bots. The opening of accounts requires personal identification and a minimum age of 14 years. Personal data should be stored in encrypted form and only made accessible to the authorities for criminal prosecution.

49: Mandatory moderation of posts on digital platforms: We call for the development of concepts as the basis for a legal regulation for the removal of criminally relevant publicity-generating posts and the labelling of problematic publicity-generating posts.

We address: Social Media Corporations und the European Union

50: Democracy-promoting algorithms: We call for algorithms of digital platforms to be adapted in such a way that the formation and hardening of bubbles is reduced. This is intended to strengthen diversity and plurality of opinion.

A.3 Ireland

Source: Resolutions booklet of the National Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy, Ireland. Limerick: Mary Immaculate College, 2025. https://issuu.com/micireland/docs/report_-_national_citizens_parliament_on_media_an?fr=sN2NjOTg0MzIzMjM

Resolutions on Systems

The National Citizens' Parliament of Ireland proposes:

1. The government establish a base level funding for non-commercial media with local councils given funding to distribute. Submissions to be received from all interested parties, in particular the public. Budgets to be distributed on a continual multi-annual basis.

2. A universal basic wage for journalists be provided, which will offer a level of financial protection.

3. Government-funded apprenticeships should be based in local newspapers and local/community radio stations. Coimisúin na Meán or a similar organization should act as the coordinator of the scheme in collaboration with Education and Training Boards/Universities, with Craol (Community Radio of Ireland), and with the RNPAI (Regional Newspapers and Printers of Ireland). The apprenticeships may lead to L6-L9 NFQ and last from 2 to 4 years.

4. The Departments of Communications, Education, Coimisiún na Meán etc. implement initiatives amongst all age groups to promote, inform and encourage the public in participation in the media; media literacy; ethics and critical thinking.

5. The Government ensure that Coimisiún na Meán has the resources and ministerial support required to ensure it can implement and enforce the Digital Services Act and the Online Safety and Media Regulations and these are to be reviewed regularly (EU).

6. Social media platforms be treated as publications in law and in regulation.

Resolutions on Representation

The National Citizens' Parliament of Ireland proposes that:

1. The Oireachtas should review legislation to allow Coimisúin na Meán to conduct more regular media reports, ensuring balance in the positive, negative, and accurate reporting of media outlets.

2. Coimisúin na Meán ensure balanced representation of all groups in the public program schedule, both in terms of content and presenters.

3. The NUJ and media owners should facilitate journalists in revisiting historical inaccuracies and/or controversial reports. 4. The NUJ and media owners should establish participation initiatives within media outlets to ensure representation of minority groups.

5. All media stakeholders should respect, recognise, protect, and portray the complexities of individuals and entities in an unbiased manner. News media reports to reflect diverse opinions fairly.

6. An embargo on opinion polls should be imposed one week before elections.

Resolutions on Participation

The National Citizens' Parliament of Ireland proposes that:

1. Media stakeholders (the NUJ, Coimisúin na Meán) facilitate quarterly regional forums with the public. Stakeholders then bring the issues raised to elected officials in a public forum, allowing for questioning of/discussion with elected officials on community/national issues and resolutions. The public must be able to be present at/participate in the subsequent meeting.

2. The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland (ASAI) conducts increased awareness campaigns, audits, and reviews of advertising and advertising standards.

3. Media literacy campaigns include education on attitudes, ethics, and the impact of media participation on the individual.

4. The EU to conduct regular critical analyses of personalized algorithms to reduce the personalization and targeting of algorithms.

5. The EU introduce traceable identity in order to post on media platforms.

6. The EU review the protection of minors on social media.

7. All bodies introduce more robust protection and better education for minors and vulnerable adults who use social media.

8. Youth education programs place more focus on the consequences of posting on media platforms.

9. Coimisún na Meán shall conduct awareness advertisement campaigns concerning their role and the capacity of the public to engage with them.

10. The EU shall require social media platform owners to input individual options for delayed posting on platforms.

A.4 Slovenia

Source: The Citizens' Parliament Demands on Media and Democracy in Slovenia. Ljubljana: Peace Institute, 2025. https://www.mirovni-institut.si/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/ANG_zahteve-zbora_booklet-web.pdf

Topic: Media Systems and Regulation

1. Every media outlet should inform its audience about their rights and obligations and provide a clear and accessible process for lodging complaints about the media outlet's work, including information on where and how citizens can file complaints.

2. The responsible Ministry should tighten the regulation of media content and the sanctions for breaches of media regulation.

3. The responsible Ministry should create a legal framework making media owners accountable for the ethical integrity of published content.

4. The law should grant greater authority to the decisions of the Journalists' honorary tribunal by ensuring that courts take its decisions into account in their proceedings.

5. Legislation should be amended to limit the dominance of political parties in the electoral system, for example, by making preferential voting mandatory. The decentralisation of the state should be introduced, for instance, through the establishment of regions. Effective parliamentary oversight of the government should also be implemented.

6. Grassroots media (independent outlets funded solely by subscribers and free of advertisements) should be encouraged and supported in their development and organisation.

7. The responsible Ministry should establish rules to increase the transparency of Slovenian media operations and financing, and media outlets should be required to follow these rules. In particular, transparency should be ensured regarding the sources of funding, how funds are allocated, and that the funds are used to produce socially relevant content.

8. The responsible state authorities should carry out stricter oversight of media ownership consolidation.

9. The responsible state authorities should define rules for reporting on the use of public funds in the media sector, and both media outlets and funders should comply with these rules.

10. A single regulatory body should be established for all types of media.

11. A special legal status should be introduced for media organisations that operate in the public interest, are socially responsible, and maintain transparency.

Topic: Media and Representation

1. Media should: a) publish more international news that is diverse, placed in a broader context, and more in-depth; b) report and select topics with less sensationalism and with greater ethical responsibility; c) publish news without misleading information, including in headlines.

2. Journalists should publish original news reports rather than merely summarizing content from other sources, and the news should contain substantive information. They should report on the developments and consequences of events, not just provide short-term, intense, and sensationalist coverage of the event itself. Editors should filter out propaganda by exposing the underlying interests behind certain information, placing it in proper context, and thereby limiting the influence of hidden agendas and interest groups.

3. Civil society should have the opportunity to influence the process of setting thematic priorities regarding what the media report on. Media outlets are encouraged to organise public meetings—e.g., once a year—where the public or civil society can directly engage with them, suggest topics, or ask why certain issues are covered in a specific way. Such meetings between the media and civil society should be systemically supported (e.g., through the provision of public venues and other infrastructure). When implementing this measure, editorial independence must be respected.

4. The European Union should fund media literacy education for all generations, especially younger and older people, with the aim of strengthening skills for identifying false or misleading news.

5. The state should ensure comprehensive media literacy education for the population. This education should begin at the preschool level and continue through all stages of formal education. It should be integrated into existing school subjects or introduced as a separate subject. For those not participating in formal education, media literacy training should be delivered through workshops, with the state supporting implementation via public calls for expert organisations, NGOs, and other relevant actors. Fostering critical thinking should be a strategic objective of the state.

6. The state should legally guarantee full protection for whistleblowers.

7. The Ministry responsible for media should launch a nationwide awareness campaign about the role and basic functioning of the media. The goal is to raise citizens' awareness of what they consume in the media, for example, understanding the difference between a news report, a factual account, and an opinion piece. The campaign could, for instance, include a fictional scenario showing a society without media to illustrate the importance of media for democracy and public life.

8. When reporting on or discussing a particular social group or minority, the media should be required to include representatives of that group, their voices, and perspectives. The principle should be: Nothing about any social group without that group. If a media outlet organises a panel discussion on a certain group, at least one participant should be a member of that group, rather than only politicians or experts.

9. The state should legally ensure dedicated funding for media organisations to enable the employment of a sufficient number of qualified journalists on a regular and sustainable basis.

10. The European Union should establish and fund Erasmus exchange programs for professional journalists, allowing for both short- and long-term exchanges. This would contribute to ongoing professional development and training. Previous obstacles that prevented the creation of such a program should be reassessed and addressed.

11. The state should provide dedicated funding for production of media content and sections that address socially relevant topics in a high-quality and responsible manner.

12. The state should promote internal (employee) ownership of media organisations, for example through tax incentives and other mechanisms. This should include encouraging the social responsibility of worker ownership and strengthening its resilience against corrupt influences. Legal provisions should ensure that no individual in employee-owned media holds a majority stake or transfers ownership to someone outside the media organisation.

Topic: Media and Participation

1. The responsible authorities and institutions should provide conditions and approaches that motivate schools and teachers to implement media literacy content and courses. The emphasis should be on a comprehensive approach, meaning that media literacy topics are integrated and participation is encouraged across various school subjects. At the same time, continuous teacher training for teaching media literacy should be enabled, and the openness of schools to guest programs on media literacy should be promoted. Critical thinking and creativity should be central, and knowledge assessment should be descriptive only.

2. The responsible authorities and institutions should implement special awareness programs on media and participation for target groups outside the formal education system. These programs should use approaches suitable to the needs and interests of the target groups. For example, for older citizens, such media literacy and participation awareness programs should be introduced through existing activities targeted at them, preceded by appropriate familiarisation (e.g., through intergenerational centers, public libraries, etc.).

3. The public broadcaster, RTV Slovenia, should create content (shows, segments, teletext pages, fictional programming, etc.) to promote media literacy and critical thinking. Art cinemas should screen films that critically explore media topics.

4. A law regulating media should establish a minimum quota for women and minorities to ensure their participation in programming content. Participation of minorities should be defined for content relevant to them, while women's participation (female experts) should be 50% across all programming content.

5. Regulations and the actions of the responsible authorities should ensure that no one is harmed or penalised for participating in the media as a source of credible information. Whistleblowers and information sources should receive maximum protection.

6. A national-level media ombudsman should be established.

7. Both public and private media, whether operating nationally or locally, should take responsibility for media literacy and enabling the participation of citizens (users).

B. Methodological instruments

Most of the methodological guidelines used in the implementation of the national Citizens' Parliaments in the four WP6 partner countries have already been presented in Deliverable 6.2, "Design of citizens' parliaments" (Monnot et al., 2025b) and its extensive annexes – among these the intake survey questionnaires used for the recruitment of citizens' parliament participants by COMMIT, CU and MI (Annex 1) as well as the Model CP-scripts from COMMIT (Annex 4) and CU (Annex 5). Below, two further methodological instruments used by all partners for data gathering in the CP process are included.

B.1 Citizens' Parliament online survey questionnaire

Note: This online survey questionnaire was set up by CU and was distributed through the common CP platform for all national CPs (translated into the national languages). It was filled out by the citizens after each CP session.

Questions:

Please be so kind to answer a few questions about the FIRST/SECOND/THIRD/FOURTH citizen parliament, which took place on ((add date)). You can write as much or as little you like. If you don't want to answer one or more of these questions, it is ok to skip it/them.

1. How do you evaluate your contribution to this citizen parliament?
2. How do you feel about the interaction with your fellow citizen parliament members during this meeting?
3. How do you feel about the interaction with the organizers of your citizen parliament during this meeting?

4a. How pleased (or not) are you about the list of subtopics that your citizen parliament produced during this first meeting? **(for CP1 only)**

4a. How pleased (or not) are you about the resolutions that your citizen parliament produced during this meeting? **(for CP2/3/4 only)**

5. What was the one thing you liked most about this meeting of the citizen parliament?
6. What was the one thing you disliked most about this meeting of the citizen parliament?

B.2 Interview guide for the post-Citizens' Parliament interviews

Note: This interview guide for the post-CP interviews was drafted by CU (Nico Carpentier and Vaia Doudaki), with input from the other WP6 partners, and was used by all national research teams.

Topics

1/warm-up and overall evaluation

How do you feel about your participation in the CP, now that the last meeting is over?
(ask for (positive / negative) evaluative statements)

Are you pleased with the resolutions?
(ask for (positive / negative) evaluative statements)

Are you pleased with the collaboration in the CP?
(ask for (positive / negative) evaluative statements)

Would you do this again?
(ask for motivation)

What did you learn from your CP experience?
(ask for details)

Has anything changed in your everyday life after your participation in the CP, for better or worse?
(ask for details)

2/participatory dimension

How free were you to do your work in the CP?
(ask for motivation)

> Were there moments where you felt too restricted?
> Where you needed more guidance?

How helpful was the input from the experts (on video and in person) to get inspiration for your work?
(ask for motivation and examples)

> In what cases did the experts help you?
> Were there moments where you think the experts ended up having too much influence?
> Or where you needed more support, information or clarifications from them?

How helpful was the input from the facilitators for your work?
(ask for motivation and examples)

> In what cases did the facilitators help you?
> Were there moments where you think the facilitators ended up having too much influence?
> Or where you needed more support, information or clarifications from them?

How helpful were the contributions of the other participants?
(ask for motivation and examples)

> Were there moments where you think some of the other participants had too much influence? Or was everything balanced?

Did you have enough time (and enough meetings) to do a good job?

How did you feel about the structure of the CP, with the three themes of 1/media systems and regulation, 2/media and representation, and 3/media and participation?

3/constructions of democracy and media in the CP

Short intro: *People have different perspectives on what democracy is, and these differences sometimes come out during long discussions (such as in CPs). We understand that our last questions are difficult, but we still would like to hear your ideas.*

What is democracy for you?

Did you see different perspectives of democracy, with different participants, in the CP? Which ones? Where these differences discussed during the CP sessions?

Was there a particular approach to democracy that was dominant in the CP discussions?

Short intro: *The same can be said about the question of what media are. People have very different ideas about what media are, and that only becomes clear in long discussions. These are our last questions.*

What are media for you?

Did you see different definitions of media with the participants, or different types of media on which participants focused? Which ones? Where these differences discussed in the CP?

Was there a particular approach to media that was dominant in the CP discussions?

4/closure

Is there anything else you want to add on the basis of on your experience in the CP?

Thank you, for your participation in the CP, and for taking time for this interview.