

29 October 2025 Online

LIVING LAB #3

Matching Citizen and Government Expectations of Digital Democracy



FINAL REPORT



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1. Methodology

1.1 Objectives

To explore how digitalisation can strengthen democracy by improving communication between government institutions and society. The goal is to assess current practices, highlight strengths and weaknesses, and develop practical ideas for better digital interaction.

1.2 Structure and Agenda

The Living Lab was held online on 29 October 2025 (09:30–12:30 CET) and combined a short plenary, two interactive workshops, and plenary report-backs.

- ➔ Plenary opening (framing & objectives). Sets the purpose, scope, and collaboration rules for the session.
- ➔ Workshop 1 (WS1): Separate sessions including two parallel breakout discussions (one with CSOs, one with Government representatives) explore digital democracy from their own experience, identifying what works and what needs improvement (experience, barriers, expectations, improvements).
- ➔ Plenary report-back: Groups share highlights; facilitators compare insights and surface overlaps/divergences.
- ➔ Workshop 2 (WS2): Joint session of mixed groups (CSO+Government) compare results and refine ideas together. Using interactive tools (mind-mapping where useful and storyboarding as the core method), participants test how solutions could work in practice and align on user journeys.
- ➔ Final report-back & conclusions: Consolidation of proposals and next steps toward the Digital Democracy App.

AGENDA		
Time	Activity	Speaker
09h30 - 09h45	Welcome & Introduction	
09h45 - 10h35	WORKSHOP 1 Government and Citizens expectations: Participants from government and civil society organisations are divided into two breakout groups to brainstorm separately on the advantages, disadvantages, and methods to improve communication and action through digital democracy.	Facilitator:1DFKI, Citizen perspective Facilitator :2 KUL, Governmental perspective
10h35 - 10h50	Report Back	
10h50 - 11h00	BREAK	
11h00 - 12h15	Workshop 2 Joint Discussion aligning expectations (UX/UI lens): The second workshop brings all stakeholders together in two mixed groups. Building on the results from Workshop 1, participants will refine and combine ideas. With support from design experts (DFKI), they will use storyboarding to visualise how these ideas could work in practice and contribute to future digital democracy tools.	Facilitator: BtH UX/UI support: DFKI
12h15 - 12h30	Report Back & Conclusions	

Figure 1. Screenshot of introductory presentation (agenda)

1.3 Techniques and Tools

The entire Living Lab was conducted **online via Zoom**, combining plenary discussions, breakout sessions, and collaborative digital whiteboards.

Video Platform: Served as the single environment for facilitation, breakout coordination, and plenary reporting. The platform's integrated breakout and screen-sharing functions supported smooth transitions between group work and collective reflection.

Digital Whiteboard: Used as the main co-creation tool throughout both workshops. Participants contributed

directly using digital sticky notes and templates designed to capture experiences, barriers, expectations, and proposed improvements. All annotations were colour-coded to distinguish between civil society and government inputs and to trace cross-group convergence.

Breakout Rooms: Two breakout rooms were used in each session.

- ➔ In Workshop 1, rooms were divided by actor group (one for CSOs, one for government).
- ➔ In Workshop 2, rooms were mixed 50/50, bringing both perspectives together to co-design shared storyboards.

Storyboarding Templates: In Workshop 2, participants used step-by-step storyboard templates on the whiteboard to visualise how digital interaction between citizens and institutions might unfold.

Voting and Synthesis: After breakout work, participants reconvened in the main Zoom room. Using the whiteboard's built-in markers, they collectively voted on and clustered overlapping ideas, identifying the most promising scenarios for further development.

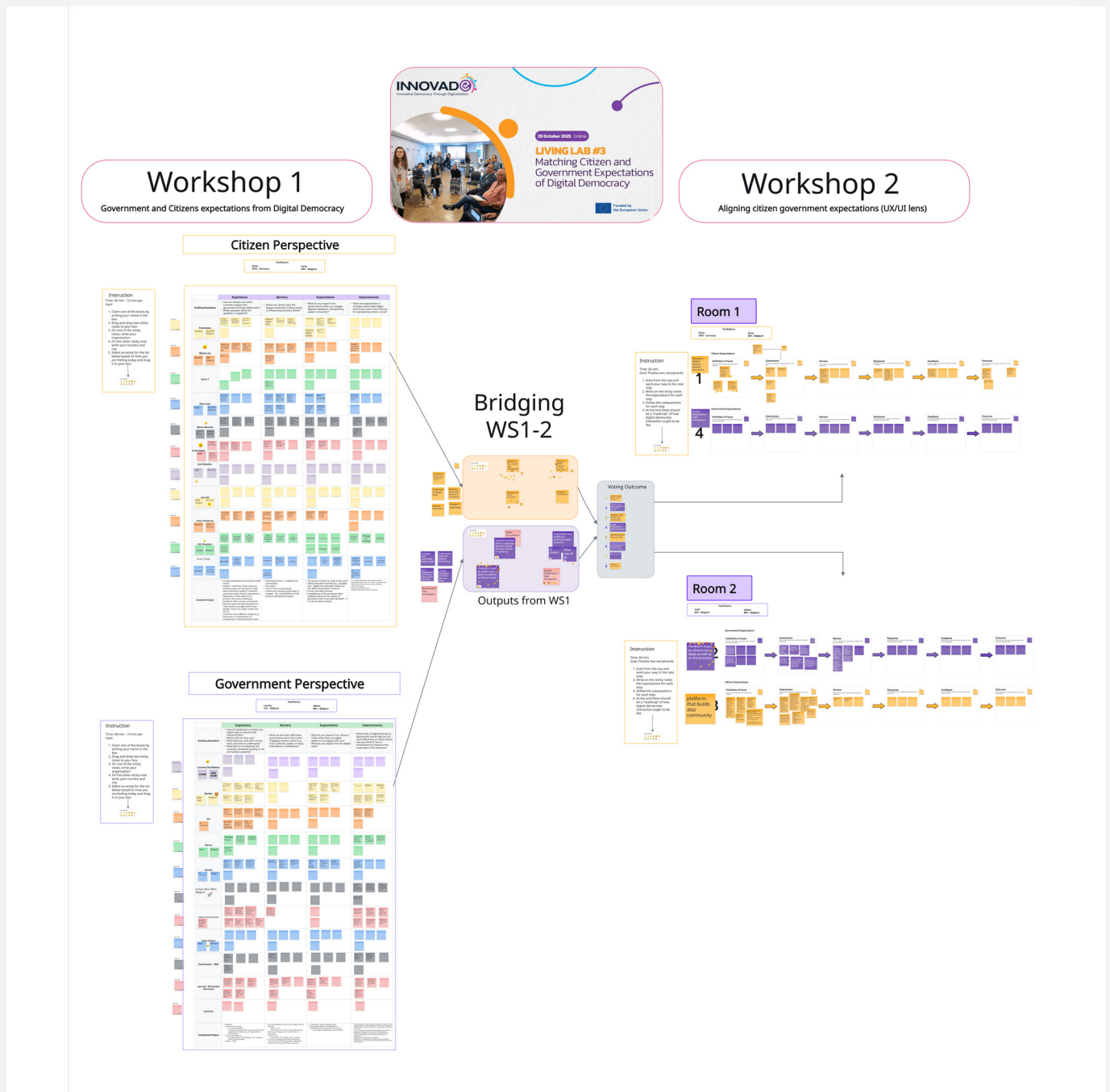


Figure 2. Overview of Whiteboard

1.4 Participants

Living Lab 3 gathered a total of 30 participants, including 14 consortium partners and 16 external stakeholders. The group represented a balanced mix of research institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs), and government bodies, ensuring a comprehensive exchange between institutional and citizen-oriented perspectives.

Academic and Research Partners: Beyond the Horizon (Belgium) served as lead organiser and facilitator, coordinating session flow and documentation while KU Leuven (Belgium), Paderborn University (Germany), and the German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI) acted as research contributors and facilitators during the workshops.

Technical Partners: Trust-IT Services (Italy) provided full technical management of the online environment. The team handled IT configurations, breakout setup, whiteboard deployment, and troubleshooting, ensuring seamless interaction throughout the fully digital Lab.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs): 9 participants from Fundación Cibervoluntarios (Spain), InePa – Institute for Electronic Participation (Slovenia), Eumans (Belgium), European Citizen Action Service (Belgium), ABF (Sweden), Januam (Germany), Aproximar (Portugal), Swarmcheck (Poland), Medienpaed (Germany), and other civic initiatives contributed diverse grassroots and advocacy perspectives.

Public Sector and Government Representatives: 9 representatives from Stad Geel (Belgium), the Ministry of Digitalisation (Poland), Flanders Government (Belgium), the City of San Martín de la Vega (Spain), Salo Municipality (Finland), the European Commission (Belgium), and the Government of Kosovo provided institutional perspectives on the use of digital tools for citizen engagement.

Geographical Coverage: Participants joined from Belgium, Germany, Spain, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Finland, Slovenia, Sweden, Malta, and Kosovo, reflecting the pan-European and cross-sectoral scope of the Living Lab.

1.5 Facilitation & Documentation

Each breakout group was supported by one facilitator and one notetaker to ensure smooth discussion flow and accurate capture of insights. The facilitation structure mirrored the Living Lab's core design: **a citizen perspective** and **a government perspective** in Workshop 1, followed by **mixed-perspective collaboration** in Workshop 2. This ensured that both viewpoints were explored independently before being brought into alignment.

The facilitation team guided participants through each exercise, provided clarifying prompts where needed, and helped keep contributions focused on concrete experience and practical implications for digital democracy tools. Documentation took place in real time by recording, using structured templates, direct annotations on the digital whiteboard, and screenshots of group artefacts. All captured material was then consolidated and thematically coded immediately after the workshop, feeding directly into the synthesis and design requirements reflected in this report.

2. Findings

2.1 Workshop 1 – Government and Citizens expectations from Digital Democracy

Citizen Perspective

Experience

- Participants explained that while many digital democracy tools already exist at EU, national and local levels, citizens rarely see clear outcomes from their engagement. Regardless of how technically advanced a platform may be, people evaluate success based on whether problems are solved and whether authorities demonstrate follow-through. When results do not materialise, new tools are perceived as superficial fixes to persistent issues.

Citizens also experience a fragmented landscape of participation platforms, with significant differences between countries and regions. Digital maturity varies widely across Europe, making it difficult to establish common standards or share best practices. In many contexts, digital interaction is still limited to uploading forms or sending emails, and true dialogue or co-creation is rare. When structured formats such as argument mapping are used, participants feel more equal and more able to contribute meaningfully.

The discussions highlighted notable inequalities in access and comfort with digital participation. Older adults, migrants and persons with disabilities face stress and usability challenges and often prefer non-digital channels. People without adequate devices, time or connectivity are also unintentionally excluded. Repeated participation without visible impact has created frustration and disengagement, reinforcing the sense that public input does not translate into real political change.

Barriers

Citizens identified several practical and structural obstacles. Many platforms suffer from poor usability and accessibility, making them difficult to navigate. Digital skills gaps further limit participation, which points to a need for free digital education that is flexible and widely available.

Affordability and connectivity barriers persist. Some people avoid digital tools entirely due to privacy concerns or a broader distrust of technology companies, which means offline alternatives remain essential. Multiple portals and login systems create fragmentation, reducing participation and heightening confusion. Without political commitment, sufficient funding and interoperability, digital initiatives risk remaining isolated.

Expectations

Citizens expect visible impact. They want to know how their input is processed, whether proposals are accepted or rejected, and why. Transparency about who analyses contributions and who decides is essential, especially when automated systems are involved.

They also expect strong privacy and data security, with options for verified anonymity where needed. Participation must remain free in terms of both access and skills. Multilingual and accessible design should ensure equal opportunity for everyone.

A hybrid engagement model is considered necessary. Digital tools should be supported by trusted local venues that help with onboarding and participation. A clear value proposition is needed so people understand why it is worth participating.

Improvements

Participants recommended starting small with tangible local use cases, then expanding once trust and value are demonstrated. A unified point of access would remove confusion and simplify participation. Accessibility should be prioritised through plain language, mobile-first design and multilingual support.

Experience

Public institutions reported using a range of basic digital tools, primarily Google Forms, Webropol, and email, to collect citizen feedback or conduct consultations. Some also use social media (Instagram, Facebook) for event announcements or quick polls, while a few manage project-specific websites for targeted participation. However, these tools function separately, resulting in fragmented communication and uneven engagement.

Language accessibility remains a major challenge: municipalities with immigrant populations or multilingual regions struggle to reach non-native speakers, even when translation options exist. Participation therefore tends to be limited to already informed or active citizens rather than the broader public.

Barriers

Participants highlighted several systemic obstacles:

- ➔ Fragmentation of channels. Inputs arrive through multiple, unconnected formats (forms, emails, attachments, letters), making processing and analysis inefficient.
- ➔ Limited reach. Consultations attract a narrow demographic; young people and minority communities are underrepresented.
- ➔ Regulatory lag. There is no common EU or national standard for digital participation tools, leaving uncertainty around data security, interoperability, and ethical use.
- ➔ Feedback deficit. Citizens often do not see results or follow-up on their contributions, leading to fatigue and declining trust.
- ➔ Tool limitations. Existing systems are rigid, lack user-friendliness, both for citizens on the front-end and for internal users who have to analyse the input on the back-end, and cannot accommodate high volumes or diverse file types.

Expectations

Government actors expressed a clear need for integrated, secure, and user-centred platforms that streamline both citizen input and administrative workflows. A central expectation was the development of a participation portal that connects existing systems across agencies, creating a single, coherent entry point for citizens and simplifying data management for administrations.

Participants also highlighted the importance of AI-assisted support for form completion, particularly to reduce administrative burden and human error. Smart assistance features could help citizens fill in complex or technical forms correctly and guide them through submission processes.

A second AI-related expectation concerned automatic translation, which would make participation more inclusive in multilingual contexts. Several institutions described translation as essential for reaching immigrant and non-native-speaking populations, for whom English or national-language platforms often remain inaccessible. In addition, participants mentioned regulatory and legal compatibility checks as a key design feature. AI tools could help verify whether proposed ideas align with existing regulations, allowing administrations to provide informed and immediate feedback to citizens.

Finally, government representatives emphasised the need for identity verification, accessibility, and feedback visibility within any future platform. The system should ensure that participants are real people, use clear and accessible language, and include visible feedback tracking so citizens can follow how their input evolves. While some welcomed limited gamification (e.g., introducing competitive elements) to engage younger users, others underlined that participation should remain serious, transparent, and grounded in civic responsibility; as the interdisciplinary knowledge base showed, the two do not necessarily contradict each other.

Improvements

To address current limitations, participants suggested several focused directions for improvement. A unified participation gateway would offer a trusted starting point for both citizens and organised civil society. Administrations expressed interest in AI-enabled conversational tools that can explain procedures, verify feasibility and provide real-time guidance.

Institutions supported a shift to open-source and EU-standardised frameworks to guarantee transparency, cybersecurity and interoperability across borders and government levels. Participation flows should be simplified so that contributors always receive acknowledgment and clear updates. Ensuring that every contribution is processed and explained would reduce uncertainty and help prevent engagement fatigue.

Overall, government representatives agreed that digital participation will only advance meaningfully if it becomes simple, verifiable and visibly consequential for both citizens and administrations.

Government Perspective

Facilitators:
Laurien
KUL - Belgium
Adrian
BTH - Belgium

Instruction

Time: 40 min - 10 min per topic

1. Claim one of the boxes by writing your name in the box
2. Drag and drop two sticky notes to your box
3. On one of the sticky notes, write your organisation
4. On the other sticky note write your country and city
5. Select an emoji for the list below based on how you are feeling today and drag it to your box



	Experience	Barriers	Expectations	Improvements
Guiding Questions	- How do institutions currently use digital tools to interact with citizens/CSOs? - Which tools do they use? - What features work well in those tools, and what is challenging? - What kind of tool features are currently somewhat missing or do not function properly?	What are the main difficulties government actors face when engaging citizens online (e.g., trust, overload, quality of input, tool defects or limitations)?	- What do you expect from citizens/CSOs when they use digital platforms to engage with you? - What do you expect from the digital tools?	- What kinds of digital features or approaches would help you act more effectively on citizen input? - Can you think of new or ameliorated tool features that could help in this endeavor?
Berten Stad Geel Belgium	- Website: form time, right to collect ideas - Hard to expect open-ended responses on a list of input - Medium-sized possible on desktop, challenging on mobile - Challenges: generating and maintaining around projects		- To generate ideas, give their opinion - Easy to customize platform	- AI summaries - Itsme - chatbots - FAQ - give people incentives to participate
An VI Overheid	- Website: form time, right to collect ideas - Hard to expect open-ended responses on a list of input - Medium-sized possible on desktop, challenging on mobile - Challenges: generating and maintaining around projects			Interactive platform, open-ended responses, open-ended responses, open-ended responses
Marina Salo Finland	- Website forms - Facebook Instagram - Official to reach citizens, open-ended responses, open-ended responses			Web access platform, social media as a channel
Klaudia KUL Foundation Malta	- Website: form time, right to collect ideas - Hard to expect open-ended responses on a list of input - Medium-sized possible on desktop, challenging on mobile - Challenges: generating and maintaining around projects	- Trust and transparency - Increase public confidence using platforms - Introduce public confidence using platforms	- better user design - better communication based outcomes - Introduce feedback opportunities	Interactive platform, open-ended responses, open-ended responses, open-ended responses
Furkan Akar (BTH) Belgium				Interactive platform, open-ended responses, open-ended responses, open-ended responses
Katarzyna Anna Klimowicz Ministry of Digital Affairs, Poland	- Lack of real dialogue and public deliberation - Lack of real dialogue and public deliberation - Lack of real dialogue and public deliberation	- Not much participation in public deliberation - Not much participation in public deliberation - Not much participation in public deliberation		Interactive platform, open-ended responses, open-ended responses, open-ended responses
David Asenjo - SMV				Interactive platform, open-ended responses, open-ended responses, open-ended responses
Sam Hill - DFKI GmbH (Germany)	- Survey on engagement: better with open to work (portal) - Long and in-depth: have to start something - Survey on engagement: better with open to work (portal)	- Survey on engagement: better with open to work (portal) - Long and in-depth: have to start something - Survey on engagement: better with open to work (portal)	- Quick and easy to use: calendar and scheduling - Quick and easy to use: calendar and scheduling - Quick and easy to use: calendar and scheduling	Interactive platform, open-ended responses, open-ended responses, open-ended responses
Ganimete				Interactive platform, open-ended responses, open-ended responses, open-ended responses
Combined Output	- Websites - Survey forms for polls - Limited participation - Language challenge with migrants and particular groups within society (e.g., through abstract terminology) - Social media platforms - Making questions via Whatsapp / FB / Instagram - Event announcements - Letters / emails	- No clear Regulations set for use of digital tools by the Govt. - Risks to use - Participation is not safe at national levels - Reaching out people and convince them to participate - Long surveys - Call to action in the middle, need to restart - Lack of real dialogue and public deliberation - Lack of one time of communication, difficulty to combine input through different channels	- To be able to involve average citizen - Have quality interaction and deliberation - Establishing binding regulations at EU level - Some specific digital tools recommended	- Interactive platform, open-ended responses, open-ended responses, open-ended responses - Real feedback and open-ended responses to experience of organizing feedback loops, not only on the content but also what is done with their ideas - Long access platform using different languages and variations - At agent answering questions, chatbots answering FAQs - Definition: responding to transparency, safe (systemically) identity of participants verified (no bots), data protection - Registration or identification of citizens (only those officially registered or we can also better language requirements based on the registration)

Figure 4. Workshop 1 – Government Perspective

2.2 Bridging Workshop 1 & 2 – Consolidating and Voting on Key Issues

After completing the two parallel breakout sessions in Workshop 1, the facilitation and note-taking teams consolidated the main outputs from the government and citizen/CSO discussions onto the shared Whiteboard. The goal was to identify core issues from each perspective and prepare for the design work in Workshop 2.

Process

During the plenary, participants reviewed the synthesised notes and discussed each issue to ensure shared understanding. Voting was then carried out separately for the two perspectives: each participant received one vote for a government issue and one for a citizen/CSO issue. Votes were placed directly on the digital whiteboard using emoji reactions.

This method preserved the distinction between citizen and government priorities while allowing cross-group recognition of overlapping concerns. The most supported items from both sides became the basis for the WS2 storyboarding exercise.

Results

Government priorities:

- Transparency of processes.
- Feedback loops to citizens.
- Wise use of AI for communication and moderation.
- Multilingual inclusion and accessibility.

Citizen/CSO priorities:

- Education and digital literacy.
- Platforms that build community.
- Transparent and accountable communication.
- European-level consultation mechanisms.

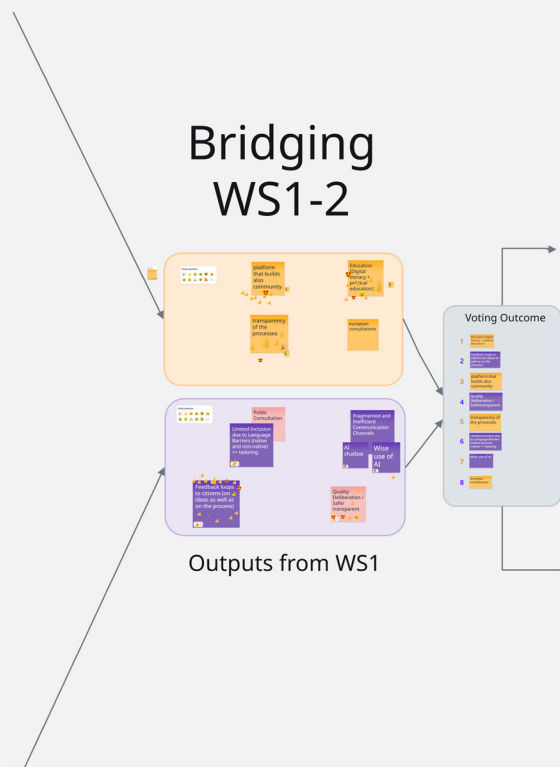


Figure 5. Consolidating and Voting on key issues from Workshop 1

2.3 Workshop 2 – Aligning citizen government expectations (UX/UI lens)

Education (digital literacy + political education)

(Note on scope: although this room drifted beyond the micro-task, the discussion quickly raised additional points to consider beyond mere task completion, so the summary below focuses on overall results.)

What participants meant by “education.” Education is not a one-off tutorial. It’s a continuous, hybrid onboarding that explains both how to use the tool and how the political process works (mandates, budgets, competencies). People want to know what the government actually does for them, and civil servants want guidance to run more deliberative, inclusive processes.

Storyboard takeaways and product requirements

The storyboard showed that every feature designed to collect input should also explain the decision process behind it. When citizens are invited to contribute, they should always see the goal, responsible actors and realistic outcomes. This means that micro-explainers in context are necessary, such as hover interactions, short cards or brief videos of 30 to 60 seconds.

When citizens submit input, they should be able to access a single dashboard with all active engagements. This dashboard must show how to participate, provide help access and gather key information in one place. Each process page should show ownership, timeline, current phase, scope, and how contributions will be used in decision making.

During the review stage, the platform should make clear how contributions are assessed and what happens next. Visible review criteria support users in understanding how their submission influences the outcome.

After decisions are made, regular updates and meaningful feedback must be provided. Citizens should see what was adopted or rejected and why, supported by short decision notes and change logs to maintain transparency.

The storyboard also suggested allowing citizens to react to outcomes, for example by asking follow-up questions to the assigned responder responsible for replies. This implies features such as outcome polls.

Finally, success from the citizen perspective means knowing what happened to their input and why a specific decision was taken. This includes a public list of addressed contributions. Measuring improved understanding may require pre- and post-engagement prompts, brief quizzes or tracking a reduction in repeated questions.

Feedback loops to citizens (Government expectations)

Core principle

Move from a one-way channel to a two-loop model: (1) citizen → government (idea submission & processing) and (2) government → citizen (status, decisions, and explanations).

Storyboard takeaways → institutional practices & system features

The core principle identified in this storyboard is the transition from a one-direction participation model to a consistent two-loop model. In this approach, citizens not only submit ideas to government, but also receive status updates, decisions and explanations that show how their contributions were handled. The system should make it possible for citizens to ask follow-up questions and see concrete examples of inputs that led to change, as well as cases where suggestions could not be implemented and why. Clear status categories such as “feasibility checked” or “not feasible,” accompanied by rationales and an exemplar gallery, help establish that transparency.

During the submission phase, public authorities require a reliable monitoring cadence to ensure that contributions are reviewed within reasonable timeframes. The storyboard highlighted that the platform should show how feedback will be given and then adhere to that approach consistently. Visualising the process as a ticket-based flow, with phases, identified owners and service-level expectations, helps both internal coordination and citizen understanding. To prevent confusion or frustration, scope boundaries must be clearly stated, including what will be done with inputs and what lies outside the scope. The system must also manage different types of data (text, images, video, audio, GIS) while keeping the user experience as simple as possible.

In the review phase, the platform should support administrative needs for prioritisation and decision justification. Data visualisation tools can show levels of support and help officials explain why certain proposals move forward. To maintain consistency, input structures and metadata need to be predefined. Offline engagement, such as meetings or physical submissions, must be captured within the same workflow to create one consolidated view of participation.

The response stage should deliver meaningful communication by combining status information with brief explanations. Participants noted that transparency should not only mean open data, but also require messages that citizens can easily understand and act upon. When the loop is closed properly, the citizen sees the outcome and understands the reasoning behind it.

The final part of the storyboard focused on learning from each engagement. The platform should collect feedback on what worked, where delays occurred and what support might be needed for different groups. Key trust indicators include predictable updates, clarity on reasons for decisions and evidence that public input contributes to policy choices. Government participants agreed that if these expectations are met, the process becomes more reliable for institutions and more credible for the public.

Platform that also builds community (Citizen expectations)

Core principle

Participation improves when the platform hosts deliberation and connects people, online and offline, rather than acting only as a dropbox for ideas.

Storyboard takeaways and community features

The storyboard for this topic focused on the idea that participation becomes stronger when the platform enables citizens to connect with one another rather than only submitting individual inputs. Participants felt that online discussions should be structured around specific topics and supported by moderated spaces, similar to Reddit-style boards, so that debate is moved away from commercial social media environments. These online spaces should serve as an extension of real communities, not replacements. Offline conversations remain essential because trust and engagement often develop through face-to-face contact.

Direct communication with officials was also seen as important, as visible human presence from the administration can enhance legitimacy and responsiveness. The storyboard suggested including forum features, co-authoring tools and traceable drafting functions so citizens can collaborate on proposals. Login and authentication mechanisms, for example via itsme, should be implemented at levels appropriate to the sensitivity of topics. Robust moderation and protection measures are required to prevent harassment and defend against foreign information manipulation.

In the submission stage, government outreach should actively support digital participation by organising workshops, local walk-events or neighbourhood updates that direct users into the same online discussions. To avoid fragmentation, the platform must allow all inputs to be submitted within one system and remain interoperable with other channels. Eligibility rules should be clear, specifying when users can remain anonymous and when verification is required. Rate limits and thresholds can help prevent spam and misuse. Users should be able to co-draft and sign proposals, and topic-specific spaces should allow citizens to engage with very local concerns so that people can immediately find the issues most relevant to them.

During review, proposals generated through community engagement should be filtered using transparent criteria. Offline activities and outputs, such as those emerging from citizen juries or facilitated events, should automatically integrate into the same thread, allowing both formats of participation to inform the review equally.

In the response and outcome stage, the two-way loop identified in the previous storyboard applies here as well. Officials should reply within the discussion thread so that the whole community can follow the reasoning behind decisions. When decisions are made, summaries and explanations need to be posted clearly, along with what will happen next. The goal is for communities to learn continuously from the process and see whether and how their involvement influenced decisions.

Success in this context is defined as **stable, well-moderated communities** where participation is **verified**, discussions remain **constructive** and a **visible connection** can be traced from community-generated drafts to institutional decisions.

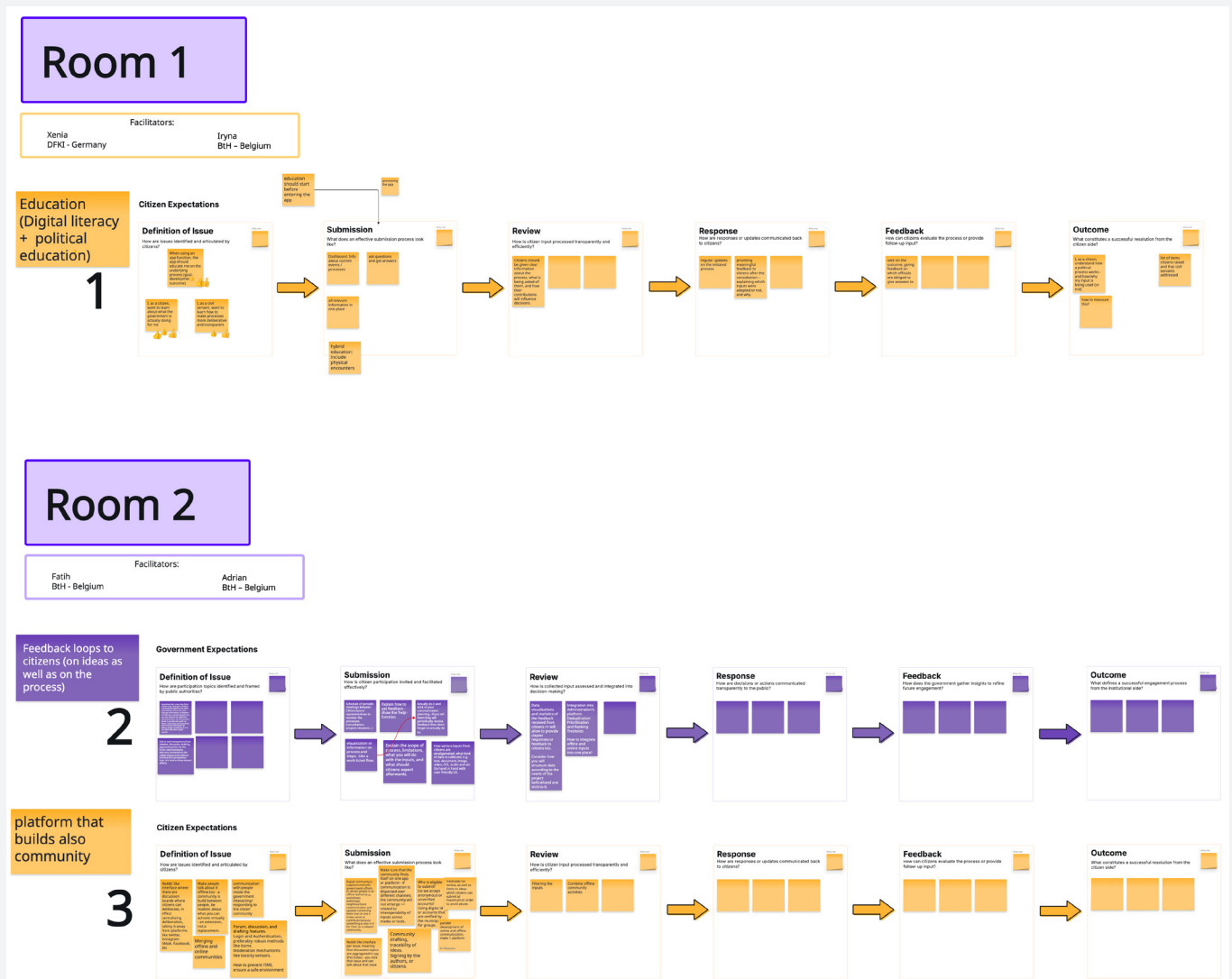


Figure 6. Workshop 2 output

3. Discussion

Living Lab 3 demonstrated the importance of bringing citizens and governments into direct dialogue to align expectations on digital democracy. The online format showed that co-design can lead to practical outcomes even when participants are not co-located, as long as both perspectives are given equal footing throughout the process.

Across both workshops, participants converged on a key understanding: **digitalisation only strengthens democracy when communication becomes genuinely reciprocal, transparent, and accountable**. Existing tools often fall short because outcomes are unclear, feedback is inconsistent, and accessibility barriers persist.

Several core insights emerged:

- ➔ Two-way communication as the new standard. Participants agreed that citizen engagement must move beyond one-directional input collection. A transparent “two-loop” model, citizen to government and government back to citizen, should become the baseline for all participatory processes. Citizens must not only contribute but also be informed about outcomes and reasons for decisions.
- ➔ Traceability and feedback as conditions of trust. The idea of a “parcel-tracking” system for democratic input captured the workshop’s spirit: people need to know what happens to their ideas at each step. Visible progress indicators, status updates, and explanations of why proposals are accepted or rejected were identified as the most effective ways to rebuild confidence in institutions.
- ➔ Hybrid participation as a necessity, not an option. The discussions showed that online platforms alone cannot ensure inclusivity. Offline venues such as libraries or community centres remain crucial to reach digitally excluded groups and to sustain local trust. The future model of participation should therefore be hybrid by design, combining digital accessibility with physical spaces for learning and engagement.
- ➔ Education as the foundation of meaningful participation. Citizens and civil servants alike need guidance to understand how participatory processes work. Civic and digital education should accompany every tool or platform, preparing both sides to interact transparently, inclusively, and constructively.
- ➔ Unified, user-centred infrastructure. Participants called for a single, interoperable entry point that connects local, regional, and national participation channels. Simplified design, multilingual access, and privacy-by-default features were viewed as essential to make participation both trustworthy and efficient.
- ➔ Success measured by transparency and outcomes. For participants, genuine progress means that citizens can see how their ideas shape policies or at least understand why certain suggestions are not feasible. Governments, in turn, should treat engagement outputs as actionable inputs to policy cycles, not as symbolic exercises.
- ➔ Process over product. Rather than building yet another “app,” the focus should be on creating living processes that make citizens’ contributions visible, traceable, and valuable, thereby strengthening both democracy and trust in government.

These insights reinforce that digital democracy depends on **both solid technology and sound democratic practice**. Well-designed interfaces can support participation, but only institutional commitments and clear accountability can sustain trust and civic engagement over time. The Living Lab succeeded in translating these principles into **applicable product requirements**, revealing not just what features are wanted, but **why** they matter.

4. Conclusions

Living Lab 3 played a bridging role in the project by clarifying what users and public administrations view as necessary conditions for digital participation to work in practice. Instead of proposing features directly, the session focused on the challenges that must be addressed for any new participation tool to be credible, adopted, and maintainable over time. The discussion underlined that progress depends not only on intuitive digital interfaces but also on clear procedures for how participation is handled inside institutions.

The results from this Living Lab, therefore, provide the constraints, priorities, and expectations that will guide the next phase of work. They indicate where design efforts should concentrate, where usability and process need to meet, and where support structures must accompany technology. This ensures that upcoming development steps will be driven by what participants consider both realistic and necessary rather than assumptions made in isolation.

These insights now serve as preparation for Living Lab 4, where participants will co-develop draft functionality and explore how the identified requirements can translate into concrete implementation choices. In this way, LL3 has contributed a clearer frame for design: it defines what must be considered so that the next iteration focuses on making those needs operational.

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