26

CONSUL CON

DAY 2 - 15:45 - Participation Stage

AI for Better Citizen Participation: Testing New Tools for Cities

CARINA HAUSLADEN - University of Konstanz, Germany
TOBIAS WEINMANN - demokratie.today

Session recap

At a glance

In the first part, Tobias Weinmann of demokratie.today, a CONSUL service provider working mainly in Germany, showed AI features built for clients such as the Munich Budget, covering project creation for administrators, proposal writing for citizens, duplicate detection, automatic routing and evaluation of results. He closed with a personal critique of where this is heading. In the second part, Carina Hausladen, a researcher at the University of Konstanz working on how people make decisions and how preferences are aggregated, presented research on the vetting and attention problems created by large-scale participatory budgeting, using public Munich Budget data, and demonstrated a lab prototype of a fair recommender feed.

Key messages

- AI can relieve administrations at every stage: creating projects, helping citizens write proposals that meet criteria, spotting duplicates, routing reports to the right staff and summarising results.
- There is a risk of shifting 'from citizen participation to machine participation' if AI writes both the processes and the proposals.
- Scale creates a vetting problem: in Munich's 2026 cycle, about 1,000 proposals had to be reviewed and 461 were deemed feasible, which also concentrates agenda-setting power.
- Scale also creates an attention problem: citizens cannot review thousands of proposals, so default sorting strongly shapes outcomes.
- Engagement-based sorting (most commented, top 20) produces a 'rich get richer' effect and can be gamed: in Munich, about 40 percent of comments were self-comments, and the vote order was almost fixed within 24 hours.
- Crowd-based approaches, from the 'wisdom of crowds' to downvoting duplicates, may help vetting more than AI alone.
- A recommender feed for participation should be transparent, steerable by the user, able to filter out ill-posed proposals, and correct for unequal exposure.

Facts, figures and references

- demokratie.today: more than 800 CONSUL projects available as 'inspirations' for import; AI scoring of proposals against hard and soft criteria; automatic routing of deficiency reports.
- Munich Budget 2026: about 1,000 proposals, 461 feasible; about 40 percent self-comments; top 46 proposals received 38 percent of votes.
- References: Galton's 'Vox Populi' (1907), the D21 (Janeček) method, UK e-petitions research, Stanford participatory budgeting platform.

Takeaways for the community

- CONSUL users can already adopt AI assistants for project creation, proposal drafting, duplicate detection and evaluation, but should decide deliberately where human input must remain central.
- Platforms should reconsider engagement-based default sorting and monitor gaming, such as self-comments.
- Research on fair, transparent feeds offers a promising path to give all proposals a fair chance in large participatory budgets.