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CONSULCON

DAY 2 - 13:45 - Main Stage

CONSUL & AI: Making the Platform More Inclusive, Accessible and Effective

JOHN MUNRO - COSLA
MAJA CIMERMAN - Danes je nov dan

Session recap

At a glance

Maja Cimerman (Danes je nov dan, a Slovenian NGO working at the intersection of democracy and technology and a CONSUL user since 2018) and John Munro (COSLA, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) presented the results of a project funded by google.org, carried out with the CONSUL DEMOCRACY Foundation, to develop AI features that make CONSUL more inclusive, accessible and effective. They first explained the infrastructure choices, especially a model-agnostic setup that lets each municipality choose its own LLM provider, and then showed live demos of six features. They closed with challenges, practical advice on cost, and the next features on the roadmap: assistants for writing and evaluating proposals.

Key messages

- AI features in CONSUL must reflect CONSUL's values: openness, open source, community use and digital sovereignty.
- The infrastructure is model-agnostic: administrators choose their LLM provider and model, including self-hosted open models or models they already pay for.
- Every AI output comes with transparency: an audit trail showing which model was used, what prompt was applied and why a decision was made. 'If it's bad, as long as it tells us it's bad, that's fine.'
- Humans stay in control: AI moderation flags or hides content according to thresholds the administrator sets, and every decision can be reviewed and reversed.
- Features are deliberately small and incremental, so lessons can be learned step by step without breaking a reliable platform.
- AI is optional. Nothing is forced on users, and the team does not want 'AI for the sake of AI'.
- LLM costs behave differently from hosting costs: usage is driven by users, so prepaid plans are recommended to avoid unexpected bills or abuse.

Facts, figures and references

- Funding: google.org, in partnership with the CONSUL DEMOCRACY Foundation, Danes je nov dan and COSLA.
- Scottish local government has spent nearly GBP 500 million through participatory processes in about five years.
- Already in core CONSUL: AI translation of user content and AI image generation.
- Tools referenced: OpenRouter, Google Jigsaw Sense Maker, an older Alan Turing Institute machine-learning module. Sense Maker was tested with Gemini, Llama and Mistral models.
- Moderation demo: 19 comments hidden by AI, each with an audit trail naming the model and reason.

Takeaways for the community

- Municipalities can start with low-risk features (translation, images) that are already in core CONSUL.
- Before enabling AI, decide on a provider and model that fits language, sovereignty and budget requirements, and use prepaid plans.
- The community is invited to pilot the experimental features and help define whether they are truly useful.