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CONSUL CON

DAY 2 - 15:45 - Main Stage

In Munich: Open Source Advocacy and Urban Verified for private and verifiable digital Voting

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LUIS BEZZENBERGER - brainbot

Session recap

At a glance

The session had two parts. Klaus Müller of the City of Munich's Open Source Program Office (OSPO) set out how a large public administration engages with open source: use existing software first, improve it through contributions, feature funding, sponsoring and support contracts, and publish what the city develops. He explained the strategic reasons behind this (vendor independence, reuse, security through transparency and citizen participation) and discussed how to encourage outside contributions. Luis Bezzenberger of brainbot (Mainz), standing in for Anja Tischer of the City of Munich, then presented a joint pilot with the Bundeswehr University Munich and the start-up Vote Base on digital voting that is both private and verifiable, shown live during the ongoing staff council election, and closed with ideas on AI agents and city knowledge bases.

Key messages

- Open source in a city administration does not mean building everything in-house. The first rule is to use existing software and not reinvent the wheel.
- Munich's model has three pillars: use, improve (contributions, feature funding, sponsoring, support contracts) and publish.
- Maintenance is the hardest part to fund. Munich sponsors CONSUL's core and also pays a service provider to run it, which buys independence: the city can change provider without changing software.
- Vendor independence, more than the loosely defined term 'digital sovereignty', is the most pressing reason for open source, given sharp price rises by dominant vendors.
- Security through transparency beats security through obscurity: public code lets others find and report bugs.
- Cryptography can resolve the tension between privacy and verifiability in digital voting: votes can be counted and the count proven correct without revealing any individual vote.
- Verification can be offered at several levels of complexity, from a simple dashboard to full independent recomputation, possibly assisted by a voter's own AI agent.

Facts, figures and references

- Munich sponsors CONSUL's core with EUR 20,000 per year and pays demokratie.today to run its instance.
- Munich sponsors Vue.js with EUR 500 per month, reflecting its wide internal use.
- Partners in the voting pilot: City of Munich, Bundeswehr University Munich, Vote Base and brainbot.
- Similar cryptographic voting is used in DAO governance: about 880 organisations and more than 370,000 votes.

Takeaways for the community

- Cities can sustain the open source tools they depend on through a mix of sponsoring, support contracts and contributions, and should budget for maintenance, not only features.
- Munich could do more to signal that outside contributions are welcome, for example through hackathons and clearer communication.
- Cryptographic voting is advancing through low-stakes pilots, with transparency dashboards designed for different levels of expertise.