26

CONSUL CON

DAY 3 - 11:45 - AI Stage

How AI Can Improve the Design of Citizen Participation Processes

LOTTE KIRCH - Offene Gesellschaft
TOBIAS KLUG - Wer Denkt Was

Session recap

At a glance

This session presented two AI tools under development that support municipalities before and after the actual participation phase. Lotte Kirch of Initiative Offene Gesellschaft presented a digital orientation aid that helps municipal staff design participation processes, developed in a joint project funded by the Robert Bosch Stiftung and tested with municipalities. Tobias Klug of Wer Denkt Was, a company with 15 years of experience running participation processes for municipalities, demonstrated a prototype 'idea management system' for analysing and tracking participation results regardless of where they came from. Technical problems delayed the first presentation, and the planned hands-on exploration was moved to informal conversations.

Key messages

- Demand for participation is rising while municipal resources shrink. Often a single staff member must design a process and campaign for it internally.
- For municipalities, 'concept development is the biggest challenge, not implementation'.
- A retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) approach, which only uses a curated knowledge base, can reduce hallucinations and make sources traceable.
- AI should support decisions, not make them: decisions remain with the municipality and its politicians.
- The hardest work often starts after participation ends: analysing input, reporting to councils and tracking what happens to each idea.
- Original citizen input should never be lost or overwritten: every change should be tracked and every AI classification flagged until a human reviews it.
- Text analysis does not require frontier models: smaller, self-hosted models are often sufficient.

Facts, figures and references

- The orientation aid is a joint project funded by the Robert Bosch Stiftung, tested with municipalities, planned to go open source around the end of the year.
- Idea management system: prototype by Wer Denkt Was (Darmstadt), running on a self-hosted GPU server, with importers planned for CONSUL and other systems.

Takeaways for the community

- Both tools target real bottlenecks for municipalities (process design and result analysis) rather than adding AI to the participation itself.
- The presenters invited municipalities to share their pain points and to test the tools, as both are still being adapted to user needs.
- An importer between CONSUL and the idea management system would directly benefit CONSUL users.