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CONSULCON

DAY 3 - 11:45 - Participation Stage

How German Public Administrations Improve Participation Quality and Inclusiveness

REBECCA PALM - Municipality of Siegburg
ANNICK POIROT - Municipality of Flensburg

Session recap

At a glance

Two platform administrators from small and medium-sized German cities shared how they work on the quality and inclusiveness of participation with CONSUL. Annick Poirot, who administers Flensburg's CONSUL platform in the city's citizen participation department, focused on accessibility. Rebecca Palm, who administers Siegburg's platform from a technical rather than political background, showed how AI already lowers barriers for both citizens and staff. Tobias Weinmann of demokratie.today, the cities' technical partner, closed with a prototype weatherproof participation box launched the day before.

Key messages

- Accessibility means everyone, regardless of abilities, can navigate participation with as few obstacles as possible. Exclusion lowers people's sense of political efficacy and leaves perspectives unheard.
- Accessibility has six levels: technological, linguistic and cognitive, visual and auditory, organisational, spatial and procedural. Legal obligations mostly cover only the first three.
- Organisational and procedural accessibility (clear steps, realistic deadlines, contacts and communication of results) are the easiest to overlook.
- Different groups can have conflicting accessibility needs, for example screen reader optimisation versus visual structures for sighted users.
- AI assistants can make submitting proposals easier and produce more complete, compliant proposals, while staff can set up projects in minutes instead of hand-coding HTML.
- Digital tools alone still leave people behind: analogue alternatives such as participation boxes in public spaces help bridge the gap.
- Transparency about AI use matters: AI-generated images are labelled, in line with the EU AI Act.

Facts, figures and references

- Six levels of accessibility: technological, linguistic and cognitive, visual and auditory, organisational, spatial and procedural.
- Flensburg uses an AI sign language avatar trained on human signers, delivered as reusable 'blocks'.
- Siegburg's AI proposal assistant: budget limit of EUR 10,000 per proposal, about eight proposals created with the assistant during a market square demonstration.
- Gelsenkirchen's accessibility audit found about 150 issues (including duplicates), almost all fixed over about six months, with certification expected.
- Participation box pilot: two boxes in Augsburg from 1 October.

Takeaways for the community

- The six-level model can serve as a practical accessibility checklist when designing processes, not just websites.
- Partnering with organisations that work with people with disabilities is an effective way to include their perspectives.
- AI assistants can lower barriers for citizens and staff, but should remain optional and be paired with analogue formats.
- Sharing accessibility audit findings across CONSUL users would benefit the whole community.