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CONSUL CON

DAY 3 - 11:45 - Main Stage

Open Source Participation Infrastructure: Towards a European Digital Commons

Timo Väliharju - COSS
Lukas Salecker - deliberAIde

Session recap

At a glance

Building on the morning keynote on digital commons, this session explored what a shared European participation infrastructure could look like in practice. Timo Väliharju of COSS (the Finnish Centre for Open Systems and Solutions), a long-standing open source advocate and one of the founders of the CONSUL DEMOCRACY Foundation, presented Voxit: why it was forked from Polis, how its European community and governance are being built, and the role of companies in open source ecosystems. Lukas Salecker of deliberAIde, a steward-owned deliberative tech start-up, then argued that AI agents now offer a simpler route to interoperability than decades of attempts at shared data standards, and ran a live demonstration in which the audience voted on simulated citizens' assembly recommendations.

Key messages

- Participation platforms should be treated as European critical infrastructure.
- Voxit was forked from Polis to remove proprietary dependencies and is being built by a coalition of public and private actors across Europe. Version 2.0 will contain no original Polis code.
- Open source is '90 percent ecosystem and community, 10 percent technology'. Companies providing services are essential for a viable open source ecosystem.
- The political climate since the second Trump administration has done more for open source and digital sovereignty in a few months than advocates achieved in decades.
- Interoperability remains one of civic tech's key unresolved challenges. Previous standardisation efforts (such as Open311) stalled when funding or leadership ended.
- 'Agent bridges' (a small deterministic client around each platform's API, exposed as a command-line tool, MCP server or plugin) let an AI agent operate and connect platforms without everyone agreeing on one data schema.
- A good, well-structured API remains the foundation. Coordination is still needed on authentication, governance, semantics and provenance.

Facts, figures and references

- Voxit: Polis fork hosted by COSS. National Finnish project on immigration with about 10,000 participants. Funded by Sitra and the Bertelsmann Stiftung. Next hackathon in Scotland in March.
- deliberAIde: steward-owned deliberative tech start-up, platform in preview, funded by a government scholarship and a small impact investment.
- An AI agent built a full CLI for an API in 48.5 minutes. Bridges are published on GitHub under permissive licences.
- Reference: the 2024 Scottish Government market research report on civic tech identified interoperability as a key unresolved challenge.

Takeaways for the community

- CONSUL and Voxit are natural partners for an API connection, combining proposal-based participation with opinion mapping.
- The CONSUL community can adopt or extend the published agent bridges as a low-cost route to interoperability with other civic tech tools.
- Sustainable governance and revenue models for European open source participation tools remain open questions shared across projects.