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UfU Independent Institute
for Environmental Issues

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European Innovation Lab

A European workshop and contest for the (further) development of digital formal participation in the European Union

By the Independent Institute for Environmental Issues – UfU e.V., Berlin, Germany

Registration possible until: 16th of May 2022

European Innovation Lab – A European workshop and competition for the (further) development of digital formal participation approaches in the European Union

Digital Public Participation is a vital element of modern democracy. Especially when it comes to infrastructural projects such as power plants, factories or railway networks, the whole society is affected. Therefore, EU legislation provides for a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), where everyone can contribute their needs and expertise. Authorities are therefore obliged to publish the information on the planned projects and offer online EIA portals.

With the ongoing COVID-19 crisis the crucial importance of an effective and efficient design of digital processes is more evident than ever. Existing processes need to be rethought and translated into the digital age. Yet the obligatory implementation of EIA portals for public participation in the EU member states could not be more fragmented - which often leads to frustration.

As the design of such a digital participation platform requires a more complex and interdisciplinary approach, the Independent Institute for Environmental Issues invites young professionals from the European Union to take part in a European Innovation Lab to design a platform that meets the demands and goals of modern digital public participation. Participants will be able to broaden their knowledge and networks while presenting ideas for tomorrow's portals to an audience of renowned experts and decision makers. ***The best concepts will be awarded: 1st Prize - 1250 €, 2nd Prize - 1000 €, 3rd Prize – 750 €.***

Programme

Phase 1: Kick-off-workshop - 20th of May 2022 (online)

The participants will be introduced to digital public participation in the European Union and especially dive into the legal basis and requirements of EIA platforms. The practicability and design of existing websites will be discussed. You will get to know other participants and have the chance to form alliances for the competition.

Phase 2: The Contest Deadline - 31st of August 2022

After being equipped with the essentials, you now have four months to develop your own concepts for a digital participation platform. The goal is to design a platform that is compatible with EU guidelines. However, it is up to you to decide on how you would like to create and implement your ideas. Out of all submissions, a jury of internationally known experts will select three finalists.

Phase 3: The Second Workshop - 16th of September 2022 (online)

In the final workshop, all participants come together with an interdisciplinary expert audience to share their experiences and knowledge. Highlight of the event will be the award ceremony. The three finalists have the opportunity to present and discuss their designs before the final winner is announced.

Admission requirements

Participation is open to young professionals (ideally between 25-35 years of age) who are studying or residing in one of the 27 EU member states. Participants are expected to have experience in relevant disciplines such as web design, graphic design, communicative design, sociology, administrative law, environmental planning, urban development or spacial planning. Participants with expertise in related fields who feel motivated to participate are welcome to register as well. All participants will be given a certificate of participation.

Registration is possible until 16th of May 2022.

Please submit your registration via <https://www.ufu.de/en/european-innovation-lab/>

For further questions, send us an e-mail to: aarhus-strong-project@ufu.de

Background Information

Independent Institute for Environmental Issues (UfU e.V.)

The Independent Institute for Environmental Issues (UfU e.V.) is both a scientific and officially recognized non-governmental organization based in Berlin, Germany. With our interdisciplinary approach, we gained nationally and internationally renowned expertise in the fields of environmental law and participation, with numerous projects on the Aarhus Convention and public participation. We understand public participation as an opportunity for citizens to comprehend decisions made by their government and administration. With the right means, public participation ensures that citizens gain transparent information on official actions, it allows them to engage with authorities and to voice concerns. By including the expertise of its own citizens in processes for policy-making and infrastructure planning, official decisions are of higher quality and gain legitimacy through citizens' approval.

Aarhus Strong Project

The European Innovation Lab is part of the UfU project *"Strengthening electronic participation rights in environmental protection in the European Union - at the same time further developing digital participation within the Aarhus Convention and the European Public Participation Directive (Aarhus-Strong)"*. It is funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (<https://www.bmuv.de/en/>).

Key goal of this project is to strengthen the electronic participation practices of member state authorities within the European Union. Throughout the project, the current situation of digital participation within the EU will be analysed, digital formal participation procedures in the European Union will be developed, workshops with country experts will be held and a participation guide will be produced. The European Innovation Lab is one of the central parts of this project.

Legal Background

Aarhus Convention and Regulation (EC) No 1367/2006

Introduced in 1998 as the "Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters" in the Danish city of Aarhus, the so called "Aarhus Convention" became the first and strongest international legally binding instrument that sets the basic rights for citizens concerning environmental democracy. To date, the Convention has 47 contracting parties - including the European Union and its member states. The EU implemented the provisions of the Aarhus Convention through Regulation (EC) No 1367/2006 and other legal acts.

Aarhus Convention: <https://aarhus.osce.org/>
REGULATION (EC) No 1367/2006: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32006R1367>

Directive 2011/92/EU

The competition of this project focusses on Directive 2011/92/EU. This Directive defines the criteria of the EIA and how to assess projects that will affect the environment. Certain amends were made to this directive in 2014 to ensure digital participation through Directive 2014/52/EU: "*Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that the relevant information is electronically accessible to the public, through at least a central portal or easily accessible points of access, at the appropriate administrative level.*"

Directive 2011/92/EU: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2011/92/2014-05-15>
Directive 2014/52/EU: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2014/52/oj>

Digital participation – Central portals for environmental impact assessments

Since the implementation deadline of Directive 20014/92/EU ended in 2017, each member state of the European Union is bound to provide information about planned projects via online portals on an administrative level. Some examples:

- "UVP-Portal" Germany (<https://www.uvp-portal.de/de>)
- Website of the Italian Environmental Ministry (<https://va.minambiente.it/en-GB>)
- "evaluación ambiental" site of the Spanish Environmental Ministry (<https://sede.miteco.gob.es/portal/site/seMITECO/navSabiaDestacados>)