Abstracts and Keywords

News media in European democracies and beyond: stable structural conditions but notorious deficits
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The research and monitoring project "Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) 2021" concluded its third round of investigation by publishing its findings in an edited volume in 2022. This article informs about the theoretical concept, the methodology and approach, the main findings, but also about the unconventional research process itself. Core findings include that leading news media remain core institutions in the diverse types of contemporary democracies, despite the ever-growing recognition and use of digital news formats. However, notorious weaknesses remain over time, such as high degrees of commercialisation, ownership concentration and gender imbalances and inequalities. Leading news media in Europe differ from those in other parts of the world regarding their internal governance and editorial independence. Member states of the European Union score slightly better in the MDM 2021 than others.

Keywords: media democracy; editorial independence; media monitoring, news digitalization; news gender balance; journalism harassment.

EU participatory democracy and EU news media - between complementary policies and sectoral needs. A reality check
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Supporting a resilient democracy and a healthier media sector are at the heart of the political debate regarding the future of Europe. At the end of 2020, the European Commission launched two interrelated action plans – the European Democracy Action Plan and the European Media and Audiovisual Action Plan – which aim to address democracy and media holistically, for supporting a pluralist public sphere, in which empowered and informed citizens are an essential part. In the academic literature, the role of meaningful political participation in a functioning democracy is widely researched and acknowledged. The same goes for the importance of free, independent, and sustainable media for informing citizens, keeping the accountability of policymakers, and fostering public debate. In the context of the European Union, a plethora of studies addresses the impact of media on political participation. However, few focus on the EU's distinct participatory model and the media's role in it.

This article aims to start a broad reflection, at a theoretical and empirical level, on the role of the European news media in the context of the participatory practices of the EU and to explore the interplay between the European policies and actions related to media, and their specific sectoral needs. Based on literature review, policy document analysis and survey inquiry, this contribution questions whether the EU approach to linking the strengthening of the European news media sector to the participatory democratic process in the EU is responding to sectoral needs. The article starts with theoretical considerations on the role of the news media sector in European participatory democracy. Then, the interconnection between the European news media sector and participatory democracy, as presented in EU actions and policies, is outlined. Lastly, based on the empirical study of companies engaged in innovative cross-border collaborations in the Stars4Media Programme, some of the needs of the European news media sector and their perception of the EU approach to support the European news media for strengthening EU democracy, are presented.

Keywords: European participatory democracy; European news media; political participation; media policy; European public sphere

Reacting to disinformation. The multilevel EU fact-checking approach
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The main objective of this article is to investigate the multilevel approach promoted and adopted by the European Union as a response to the fake news phenomenon. On the one hand, the multilevel approach rests on the integration of different territorial levels (local, national and international). On the other hand, it adopts a multi-actor strategy aiming at the hybridisation of competences and increasingly consolidated network strategies, thus trying to overcome the main limitations and inefficiencies of fact-checking and debunking practices.

This article, besides reconstructing from a longitudinal perspective the main stages of development and actions linked to the multilevel strategy, analyses its concrete operationalization within the fact-checking network of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), a certified community of actors created in 2021, which counts 94 debunking projects spread across the various countries of the Union. Each project was analyzed with respect to 12 variables, which can be traced back to three dimensions, respectively: multi-territorial, multi-actor, and fact-checking practices.

From the analysis, the following results emerge: regarding the multi-territoriality dimension, the EDMO network includes and integrates different territorial levels, but remains predominantly focused on the national dimension. Considering the multi-actor dimension, the research highlights that at the macro level the nature of the projects belonging to the network is varied, with an imbalance towards the private sector. Looking at the level of the individual actors (the micro level) involved, there is a low integration of professionalism and still a residual involvement of civil society. Finally, concerning the fact-checking practices the analysis reveals an excessive lack of homogeneity at the methodological level, highlighting the need to develop a common methodology at the European level.

Keywords: Disinformation, Fact-checking, Debunking, European Union, Multilevel approach, EDMO

Le piattaforme per la partecipazione digitale dei cittadini. Un'analisi basata sul modello di UE e Italia
Maria Cristina Antonucci, Andrea Volterrani

Il testo si propone di considerare e confrontare le esperienze europee e italiane di produzione, gestione, valutazione di piattaforme digitali per la partecipazione dei cittadini alle politiche pubbliche. Diversi obiettivi, modelli di costruzione, scelta delle finalità caratterizzano i due sistemi, europeo e italiano: il primo volto a sollecitare una partecipazione ideale verso il modello di Europa del futuro; il secondo è concretamente orientato all'esperienza di partecipazione, con participatory budget e allocazione di risorse per politiche pubbliche localizzate e con obiettivi tangibili (es. riqualificazione delle città). Dal confronto e dalla sintesi di queste due esperienze si possono trarre utili elementi teorici ed empirici per un ulteriore sviluppo delle piattaforme digitali per la partecipazione dei cittadini, in un contesto di crescente domanda partecipativa attraverso formati e strumenti non convenzionali.

Parole chiave: piattaforme partecipative, UE, Italia, partecipazione digitale, partecipazione dei cittadini

The paper aims to consider the UE and Italian experiences of production, management, evaluation of digital platforms for citizens' participation in public policies. Comparing tools and formats of the two models of developing civic participation through ICT platforms, the emerging analysis presents differences in objectives, in the construction models, in the choice of purposes. In the EU case, the system aims at soliciting an ideal civic participation towards the model of Europe of the future, progressively encompassing more and more citizens, while the Italian outline gears towards more concrete and localized experiences of participation, especially in city-level participatory budgets with tangible objectives of urban transformation. From the comparison and synthesis of these two experiences, some theoretical and empirical elements can be drawn, in order to sketch a further development of digital platforms for citizen participation, in a context of growing participatory demand through unconventional formats and tools.

Keywords: participatory platforms, EU, Italy, digital participation, citizens' participation

Dieci anni ma non li dimostra. Lo spazio dell'Iniziativa dei cittadini europei e la sua evoluzione nel quadro delle politiche di rafforzamento della partecipazione
Rossana Sampugnaro

L'Iniziativa dei Cittadini Europei [ICE] è un istituto che fornisce ai cittadini europei la possibilità di un'interlocuzione diretta e senza mediazioni con la Commissione Europea e tramite quest'ultima con il Parlamento Europeo e con il Consiglio. Prevista nei Trattati dell'Unione, la ICE è diventata una concreta opportunità per gli europei solo nel 2012, rimanendo tuttavia poco conosciuta dalla popolazione e poco utilizzata. Attraverso l'analisi dell'insieme delle proposte presentate nei primi 10 della sua implementazione, lo studio si pone l'obiettivo di capirne la natura e l'evoluzione nella prima fase di applicazione. Dai dati emerge che l'interesse per l'iniziativa cittadina europea non sia stato omogeneo nei 28 stati e che vi sia stato invece un coinvolgimento minore negli paesi di più recente ingresso nell'Ue. Il complesso delle policies promosse dai cittadini europei mostra una preponderanza di istanze post-materialistiche, orientate a difendere l'ambiente e i diritti civili e sociali ma anche le peculiarità nazionali. L'esplorazione delle iniziative disegna un'Europa nella quale accanto alle priorità politiche dell'Unione, se ne affiancano altre diverse, ritenute urgenti o solo desiderabili dai suoi abitanti.

Parole chiave: Iniziativa dei Cittadini Europei, Partecipazione politica, Sfera Pubblica Europea

The European Citizens' Initiative [ICE] is an institution that provides European citizens with the possibility of direct - disintermediated - dialogue with the European Commission and through the European Commission with the European Parliament and the Council. Provided for in the EU Treaties, the ICE became a real opportunity for Europeans only in 2012, however remaining little known by the population and little used. Through the analysis of the entire set of proposals presented in the first 10 of its implementation, the study aims to understand its nature and evolution in the first phase of application. The data shows that interest in the European citizen initiative has not been homogeneous in the 28 states and that there has been less involvement in those that have recently joined the EU. The set of policies promoted by European citizens shows a preponderance of post-materialistic instances, aimed at defending the environment and civil and social rights but also national peculiarities. The analysis of the initiatives picture a Europe in which alongside the political priorities of the Union, there are other different ones, deemed urgent or only desirable by its inhabitants.

Keywords: European Citizens' Initiative, Political Participation, European Public Sphere

Involvement of Young Citizens in Transnational Communications flows: Together for Europe
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The article aims at analysing emerging communication flows of transnational public debate supported and promoted by European institutions. Innovative practices that involve youngsters are the main focus. The article presents a qualitative study conducted through the analysis of the together.eu initiative, a pan-European community promoted by the European Parliament after the 2019 elections. The research was supported by semi-structured in-depth interviews with some young Italian volunteers of the community and co-founders of independent organisations.
The results show the ability of young people to play a sort of ambassadors or micro-influencers roles. In such experiences, European institutions work like a connecting point to bring young Europeans closer to each other and sometimes they operate as "activators" of participation. Nevertheless, young activists easily go beyond the institutional framework if they feel confident their own initiatives can reach their peers more effectively. An important caveat emerges in relation to these networks of communication: the young people involved appear to be those already interested in public debates on European issues.

Keywords: European identity, European institutions, youth, social media, public sector communication, higher education students

United we stand: narratives of Latvian leading politicians on unity and values of the European Union during Covid crisis (2020-2021)

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The Covid-19 pandemic challenged the ability of governments to communicate their decisions. The problems encountered highlighted country-specific and long-unresolved issues. The object of the research is Latvia's leading politicians who have profiles on the most popular social media in Latvia - Facebook. The aim of this paper is to analyze narratives of those members of the Government and the Saeima who held positions related to the areas affected by the pandemic and find out how they communicated about the problems of the European Union (EU) and related topics during the Covid-19 crisis. The research case is relevant because Latvians have one of the lowest trust rates in the national parties, the parliament and the government. Also, in the first half of 2021, Latvia faced one of the lowest vaccination rate in the EU. That has influenced the communication of politicians, as decision-making can happen taking into account the mood and perceptions of the population.

The core values of the EU can be identified in the communication of Latvian politicians, permeating a wide range of issues, highlighting the importance of unity and mutual cooperation in the implementation of successful policies. Politicians don't try to broaden the scope of values and goals, but it is possible to observe different interpretations of the breadth of values, adapting it to the position and political goal. Politicians also refer to the EU to cover own faults.

The results are useful for comparing examples of political communication practices during Covid-19 crisis and the reference to European values in National political discourses.

Keywords: Political communication, Narratives, Covid-19 pandemic, European Union, Latvia