NATIONAL CITIZENS' PARLIAMENT ON MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY, IRELAND
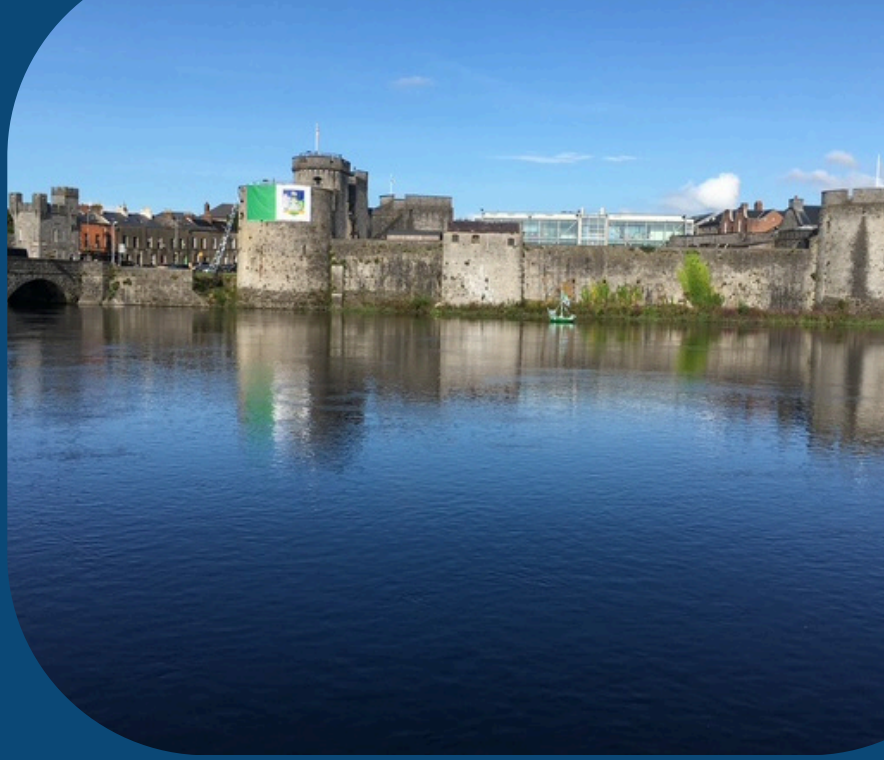

Image: King John's Castle, Limerick City, Ireland, Copr:JMcI

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

Funded by the EU through HORIZON, the National Citizens' Parliament of Ireland is part of the MeDeMap research project.

The MeDeMap project aims to help future-proof pathways to strengthen democracy through improving the accountability, transparency, and effectiveness of media production, while also expanding active and inclusive citizenship.

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What is MeDeMap?

This is a pan-European, 3-year research project undertaken by 10 European countries: Ireland, France, Estonia, Slovenia, Czechia, Germany, Austria, Portugal, Italy, and Poland.

The name **MeDeMaP** says it all.

How can we **MAP** ways for the **MEDIA** to support and protect **DEMOCRACY**?

This has never been more important as misinformation, disinformation, and fake news make it more and more difficult for citizens to know what is true, what is objective, and what news they can trust.
Probably the most important part of the research deals with what people make of their media and how they use it.
Focus groups and interviews were conducted across Europe and have provided a wealth of information on what audiences do and on what they feel needs to be done.
By far, the most exciting and innovative part of the project has been the convening of the citizens' parliament.

The Irish research was led by Dr. Rosemary Day, Head of the Media and Communications Department at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Researchers on this project were Jude McInerney and Kathy Cush, also from the Media and Communications Department in Mary Immaculate College.

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What is a Citizens' Parliament?

The citizens' parliament is the capstone of the MeDeMap project, enabling us to build a map to support journalists in protecting democracy for the future.

The research project studies the extent to which certain media, under which conditions, perform which democratic functions, for which audiences, thus making it apparent what is at stake for democratic media and for democracy itself.

Citizens' parliaments are democratic tools to empower citizens and to enable their voice to be heard. Citizens are given information by experts, they debate and deliberate on issues, and they formulate recommendations or resolutions to bring to those in power. The expectation is that politicians, civil servants, business owners, and other stakeholders will use these resolutions as a resource and as an impetus for change. In this way, the work of the citizens will have an impact.

Citizens' parliaments do not replace the democratically elected parliament or government, but they complement and enrich them, allowing for more citizen participation.

Ireland has a rich history of operating Citizens' Assemblies. This experience was drawn upon to convene the National Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy.

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What is a Citizens' Parliament?

After an extensive advertising campaign, twenty citizens were chosen from a field of over 60 applicants. They were chosen to provide as wide a range of diversity as possible. This initiative provided Irish people with the opportunity to be part of this democratic research.

It also provided Irish people with the opportunity to participate in innovative research and, more importantly, to have their say about how we should support the media to protect democracy.

The theme of this Irish Citizens' Parliament was media and democracy. Participants reflected on the role of media in strengthening Irish democracy. Issues that were discussed are:

- How to organise the Irish media landscape to better serve democracy
- How particular media content can better support democracy
- How to ensure fair representation for everyone in the media and in democracy
- How citizen participation can be enhanced in and through the media

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The Information gatthering stage

After a briefing by experts at the start of each day, the citizens went on to discuss the issues highlighted and to formulate resolutions on how to protect journalists, free speech, and the public's right to information so that democracy can run smoothly and not be corrupted or co-opted by undemocratic persons or forces. They produced **22 resolutions** divided between media **SYSTEMS**, **REPRESENTATION**, and **PARTICIPATION**.

22.03.2025	05.04.2025	26.04.2025	10.05.2025
Democracy?	**Systems?**	**Representation?**	**Participation?**
Denis Wolinski; OFCOM, BAI	Roddy Flynn, DCU	Eileen Cullotty, DCU	Brian Greene, Community Media Activist
Fergal Quinn, UL	Joe Nash, Live 95; Áine Fitzgerald, Limerick Leader	Sindy Joyce, Ul, Traveler activist; Lylian Fotabong, MIC, Refugee activist	Calum Fabb, Coimisiún na Meán, Social Media
	Lunch with Councillors and TDs		
What is democracy?	**6 resolutions**	**6 resolutions**	**10 resolutions**

Experts from the international MeDeMap team who presented topics to the citizens via video were: Dr. Nico Carpentier (Charles University, Prague), Dr. Vaia Doudaki (Charles University, Prague), Dr. Beata Klimkiewicz (Jagiellonian University, Krakow), Dr. Jeffrey Wimmer (University of Augsburg), and Dr. Andrea Miconi (IULM University of Milan).

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Images of work in progress: citizens write their opinions on cards, images 1 and 2. The citizens then deliberate in small groups and form resolutions, image 3. These groups come together in the citizens' parliament, where they vote on and fine-tune the resolutions on **Systems, Representation, and Participation**, image 4. The citizens also discussed, **What is Democracy?**
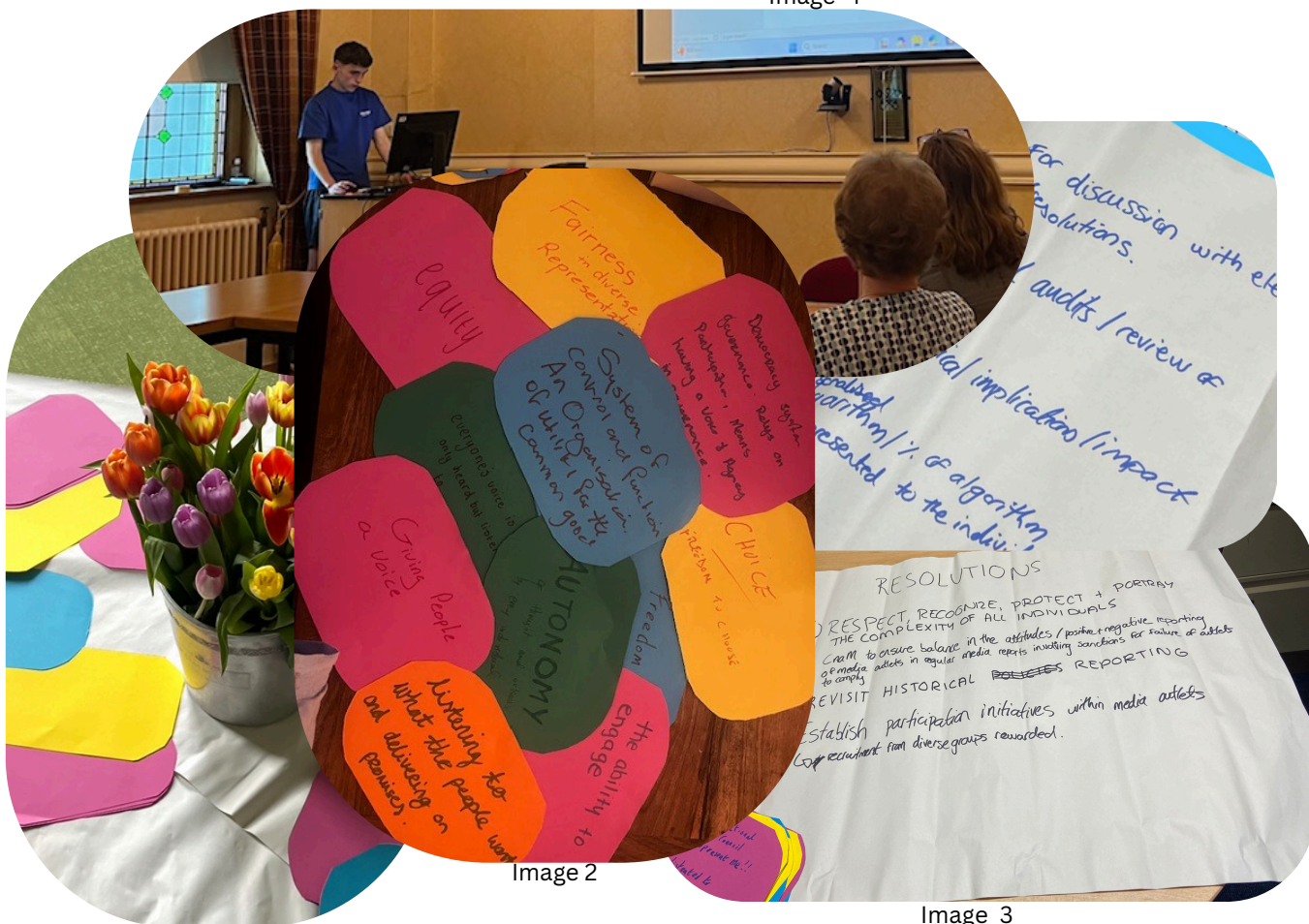
Image 4

Image 2

Image 3

Image 1

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Irish Citizens' responses to:
What is democracy to you?

Listening to our people, to what they want, and delivering on policy

Autonomy of thought, of actions, the possibility to think and act autonomously without being dictated to!

!

Democracy is putting my views out there with the expectation that they will, at the very least, be considered.

Freedom to choose how we live, who our leaders are, and in a society that does its best to treat all fairly.

Democracy is :
Transparent, Fair, and Honest.

WHERE COUNTRIES GOVERN FOR THE GOOD OF ALL CITIZENS

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RESOLUTIONS ON SYSTEMS

The National Citizens' Parliament of Ireland proposes:

1.The government establish a base level funding for non-commercial media with local councils given funding to distribute. Submissions to be received from all interested parties, in particular the public. Budgets to be distributed on a continual multi-annual basis.

2. A universal basic wage for journalists be provided, which will offer a level of financial protection.

3. Government-funded apprenticeships should be based in local newspapers and local/community radio stations. Coimisúin na Meán or a similar organization should act as the coordinator
of the scheme in collaboration with Education and Training Boards/Universities, with Craol (Community Radio of Ireland), and with the RNPAI (Regional Newspapers and Printers of Ireland). The apprenticeships may lead to L6-L9 NFQ and last from 2 to 4 years

4. The Departments of Communications, Education, Coimisiún na Meán etc. implement initiatives amongst all age groups to promote, inform and encourage the public in participation in the media; media literacy; ethics and critical thinking.

5. The Government ensure that Coimisiún na Meán has the resources and ministerial support required to ensure it can implement and enforce the Digital Services Act and the Online Safety and Media Regulations and these are to be reviewed regularly (EU).

6. Social media platforms be treated as publications in law and in regulation.

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RESOLUTIONS ON REPRESENTATION

THE NATIONAL
CITIZENS' PARLIAMENT OF IRELAND, PROPOSES THAT:

1. The Oireachtas should review legislation to allow Coimisúin na Meán to conduct more regular media reports, ensuring balance in the positive, negative, and accurate reporting of media outlets.

2. Coimisúin na Meán ensure balanced representation of all groups in the public program schedule, both in terms of content and presenters.

3. The NUJ and media owners should facilitate journalists in revisiting historical inaccuracies and/or controversial reports.

4. The NUJ and media owners should establish participation initiatives within media outlets to ensure representation of minority groups.

5. All media stakeholders should respect, recognise, protect, and portray the complexities of individuals and entities in an unbiased manner. News media reports to reflect diverse opinions fairly.

6. An embargo on opinion polls should be imposed one week before elections.

The deliberation stage

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RESOLUTIONS ON PARTICIPATION

THE NATIONAL CITIZENS' PARLIAMENT OF IRELAND, PROPOSES THAT:

1. Media stakeholders (the NUJ, Coimisúin na Meán) facilitate quarterly regional forums with the public. Stakeholders then bring the issues raised to elected officials in a public forum, allowing for questioning of/discussion with elected officials on community/national issues and resolutions. The public must be able to be present at/participate in the subsequent meeting.

2. The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland (ASAI) conducts increased awareness campaigns, audits, and reviews of advertising and advertising standards.

3. Media literacy campaigns include education on attitudes, ethics, and the impact of media participation on the individual.

4. The EU to conduct regular critical analyses of personalized algorithms to reduce the personalization and targeting of algorithms.
5. The EU introduce traceable identity in order to post on media platforms.
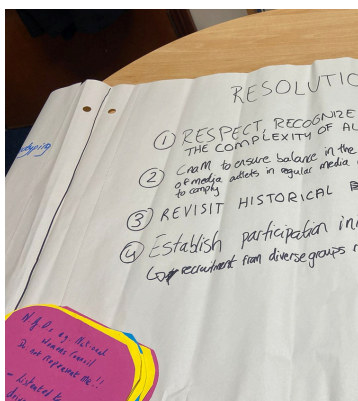
6. The EU review the protection of minors on social media.

7. All bodies introduce more robust protection and better education for minors and vulnerable adults who use social media.

8. Youth education programs place more focus on the consequences of posting on media platforms.

9. Coimisún na Meán shall conduct awareness advertisement campaigns concerning their role and the capacity of the public to engage with them.

10. The EU shall require social media platform owners to input individual options for delayed posting on platforms.

The deliberation stage

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OVERVIEW
THE ENTIRE RESEARCH PROJECT

This project has examined the legislative and regulatory conditions of the media across Europe.

It has built a detailed database of news media in each country. Interviews were conduct with 120 journalists, editors, and senior managers. These were selected to represent a broad sweep of the entire field of news production.

All types of media ownership that exist were represented in these interviews (from public service to independent commercial, to community media), and all types of platforms for news dissemination (from digital natives to television and radio, and from the national to the local printed press).

Here in Ireland, topics highlighted were:

- The high cost of defamation laws

- The importance of fact-checking

- The need for more investment in journalism

- Advertising funds leaving traditional media

- Experienced staff leaving and not being replaced

- The speed and toxicity of social media

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OVERVIEW
OF THE IRISH FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups were also recruited in the Spring of 2024.

Forty participants from diverse sections of society, ranging from 18-65+, were divided into five focus groups. During these focus groups, the topic of media and democracy was discussed.

Topics highlighted were:

- Freedom of speech, thought, and expression
- Giving people a choice
- The importance of participation by voting
- The overwhelming abundance of media available
- The rise of the far right on social media
- Media shaping culture
- Media literacy
- Lack of fact-checking on social media
- Social Media and algorithms
- The RTE scandal

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IMPACT

The 22 resolutions of the National Citizens Parliament are being brought for consideration to:

- **Limerick City and County Council**

- **The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and Sport**

- **The European Parliament and the European Commission**

- **The National Union of Journalists (NUJ)**

- **Coimisiún na Meán**

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the European Union

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the 20 citizens who generously gave their time and their energy to formulate these 22 resolutions to activate change here in Ireland and across Europe.

Our Advisory Board

We thank our advisory board for their time and expertise:

- John Moran, the Mayor of Limerick
- Joe Nash, Live 95
- Áine Fitzgerald, The Limerick Leader
- Dr. Fergal Quinn, UL
- Eoin Brady, Internal Communications Manager, UL
- Dr. Neil Ward, NUJ and DCU
- Cathy Halloran RTE

We also thank you for considering the resolutions presented on behalf of the National Citizens Parliament of Ireland on Media and Democracy.
Gur fada buan sibh!

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(image above: Irish Citizens Parliament representatives L-R Niall Mahon, Moya Ni Chealligh and Con Cronin

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https://www.medemap.eu/

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