A Step Forward to a Digitally-Assisted Democracy in Europe: Talking Points from the 4th Council of Europe Platform Exchange on Culture Digitisation

In any one minute on the Internet, there are millions and millions of clicks. But, are we clicking critically and wisely?

What is the role of the media in the so called "democratic public sphere"?

Can collective reason respond only with contempt and irony today?

In a series of pertinent questions that framed the 4th Council of Europe Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation this October, these were just some of the ones that stood out the most. Blending different points of view, personal experiences and professional interests, this year's conference offered a comprehensive perspective on Europe's digital culture.

With the focus on populism, fake news, and different political and ideological movements that are increasingly present in the digital space, the participants addressed critical issues relevant to culture and digitisation. In three sessions, they considered ways to tackle these issues and empower citizens to handle them in a spirit of democracy.

Kimmo Aulake, Chair of The Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP) referring back to points raised in an earlier meeting in February between Peter Weibel, Chairman and CEO of ZKM-and Council of Europe staff said:

"Democracy needs competent citizens. How can citizens develop these competences? Digital tools can help. We actually need a tool-assisted democracy."

This quote alone sums up nicely the conference's key purpose – to discuss and provide guidance on the best practices for creating culturally competent citizens; a complex task requiring a multitude of actors. Art, Science and Culture sectors and their networks play a vital role in achieving this, which is why the 4th Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation assembled professionals with different backgrounds and approaches to art and culture.

Their unique views and outstanding expertise helped paint a new picture of a digitally-enabled society and shed new light on the post-truth narratives that Europe is witnessing today.

The shape and flow to the first session was given by Peter Sloterdijk, who discussed "*Democracy as pseudonymy*" and offered a critical observation of the conference's key topics. He delved into four forms of intensive *pseudonymy* that typify the exertion of political power today: *oligarchy, fiscocracy, mobocracy and phobocracy.*

The second session opened with a speech on "Digital competence?" by Hito Steyerl, a filmmaker, visual artist, writer, and innovator of the essay documentary. Examining the very notion of "competence" and its relation to market competition, she discussed the different ways in which citizens can be made incompetent. In her view, the free market does not exist and this very fact creates a "market of confusion," which may impede citizens from being fully competent.

In addition to the keynote speeches, panellists provided striking insights and examples of digital tools used to address populism, fake news and todays' ills.

Salomé Voegelin and Anna Barney introduced an alternative way to understand the border between fact and fiction by learning to listen to "the fake." They presented some of the research of the *Listening Across Disciplines* network, inviting the audience to explore our ability to perceive what is true and what is false. For digital citizens, listening could be key to avoiding the simple acceptance of fake news, untruths and post-truth narratives, but they need to be educated on how to do it right. By showing details of the telephone devices of participants in the room on his own device, Julian Oliver convinced participants that critical engineering and even hacking ought to be taught to everyone today. Participants also learnt about the potential of blockchain technology, of science art and data journalism and of community-based transformation processes for democracy.

Four essayists made significant contributions to the topic. Their work tackled populism, digital intermediation, and related topics in the context of art and culture. Evgeny Morozov's [Digital Intermediation of Everything](#), Jan-Werner Müller's [The Perils of Populism](#), Gunnar Schmidt's [On the Aesthetics of Populism in the Digital Age](#) and Martin Emmer's Citizens, state and culture - keys to democratisation of the digital world offer profound insight into the conference's key topics.

The many creative views and quality expert research papers enabled the 4th Council of Europe Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation to take the discussions on Europe's digital future to an exciting new level. The expected outcome of the meeting is for the Council of Europe to develop a set of policy inspirations and good practices to contribute to combatting populist and anti-democratic movements, while helping build digitally and culturally competent citizens who understand the challenges of todays' digital realm and act according to this understanding. Work on collecting policy inspirations has started and a conference report and film are being prepared and will be made available soon on the event website at www.coe.int/4platform.