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MASTER THESIS

The Europe Direct Network - Are Europe Direct Information Relays an Adequate Means to Fight the Perceived Democratic Deficit?

Experiences From the German Network

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Statement of Authorship

I hereby declare that this master thesis has been written only by the undersigned and without any assistance from third parties.

Furthermore, I confirm that no sources have been used in the preparation of this thesis other than those indicated in the thesis itself.

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Münster, 13th March 2009

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Abstract

This thesis examines whether Europe Direct information relays are an adequate means to fight the perceived democratic deficit. Devised by the European Commission as a means to close the gap between the citizens of the EU and Brussels, the relays have a dual role assuming a mediating function. On the one hand, they provide access to information to increase people's knowledge on EU related issues; on the other hand, they constitute a platform that enables people to join in a dialogue with each other and the institutions. In theory, the relays appear to be an adequate means to fight the perceived democratic deficit. However, a number of independent variables impact on the relays' capacity to act, such as their host structure, the services offered by the Commission, as well communication priorities issued by the Commission. Our empirical research shows that the relays' work is dependent on those factors irrespective of the European Commission's guidelines and wishes. Furthermore, the Commission's approach is far too broad to meet the needs of all Europe Direct information relays in Germany. Finally, the relays do not fulfil both roles in equal measures. The relays' feedback function is clearly outweighed by the processing of enquiries, which most relays regard as their main function.

Key Words: perceived democratic deficit, Europe Direct information relays, Plan D, political knowledge, deliberation

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1. INTRODUCTION

The academic debate on the EU's democratic deficit is substantial, and a great many scholars have investigated this phenomenon, although some persistently deny its existence or relevance (e.g. Majone, 1998; Moravcsik, 2002). Yet, there is agreement among those arguing for the existence of the democratic deficit that there is a noticeable lack of transparency (Hayes-Renshaw, 2002) and accountability (MacCormick, 2005) with regards to the institutions, as well as a general lack of input legitimacy (Sharpf, 1999).

The *perceived* democratic deficit is somewhat more problematic as – unlike the subject of the academic debate – it is a more difficult concept to grasp. It is probably best conceptualised as a 'gap' between the citizens of the EU and Brussels, whereby people's image of the EU and its institutions is fairly negative. As decision-making power has been gradually transferred to the supranational level, little opportunity has been left for EU citizens to actively participate and deliberate matters of their concern. The Eurobarometer, furthermore, claims that there is a correlation between the negative image of the EU and citizens' low level of knowledge on EU related issues (EB 68, 2008).

Arguably, this poses a considerable obstacle to the EU in general: When the ratification of the European Constitutional Treaty dramatically failed in 2005 with negative referenda in both the Netherlands and France, the Heads of States and Government called for a "period of reflection" (European Commission, 2005 b). They had to realise that they had left the people of Europe behind and that they had not succeeded in communicating their plans to them. An "Action Plan" was adopted aiming at ensuring "more effective communication about Europe", the three main strategic principles being listening, communicating, and connecting with citizens by 'going local' (European Commission, 2005 a: 3-4). In the same year, "Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate" was launched, which set out a long-term plan "to reinvigorate European democracy and help the emergence of a European public sphere, where citizens are given the information and the tools to actively participate in the decision-making process and gain ownership of the European project" (European Commission, 2005 b: 2-3).

The European Commission attaches great value to the so-called Europe Direct network which is thought to play a key role in the success of Plan D (Wallström, 2006). Since January 2009, there are roughly 480 relays in the EU, of

which 59 are situated in Germany¹ (EU-Nachrichten 01/2009). Initiated by the European Commission and co-funded by public-sector bodies or private-law bodies with a public mission, they are supposed to be the first port of call for EU citizens if they need information or advice on any EU related issue. At the same time, however, they provide the opportunity for people to voice concerns or simply express their views on the EU and its workings, which will then – in theory – be fed back to the European Commission.

Applying Shannon and Weaver's communication model (1969), Europe Direct information relays can be seen to have a mediating function, transmitting information and a positive European image from the European Commission to the people of Europe. This suggests that Europe Direct information relays have the following dual role:

1. Improving EU citizens' level of knowledge
2. Enhancing debate and dialogue between citizens and the EU institutions.

With these two functions Europe Direct information relays address the two pivotal characteristics of the perceived democratic deficit – lack of political knowledge and the lack of access to deliberation. In one institution, the relays aim at improving both the citizens' knowledge on EU related issues, as well as offering an arena of deliberation that enables citizens to actively take part in the decision-making process.

Political Knowledge, indeed, is a central aspect in the arena of democratic theory. Often it is seen as an important requisite for democracy (e.g. Dahl 1989 and 1998) and there are numerous studies about the correlation between political knowledge and participation (e.g. Delli Carpini et. al., 1996). Some surveys suggest that political knowledge can be enhanced by deliberation (e.g. Lushkin et. al., 2002; Sturgis et. al., 2005). Through deliberation people can try to find solutions to problems, but even if no consensus is reached, deliberation is said to induce learning effects and have positive effects on transparency (Peters et. al.; 2004). This linkage between political knowledge and deliberation again emphasises the unique role of Europe Direct information relays, as the relays' second function is related to the concept of deliberation, which has become a cornerstone of democratic theory in

¹ In 2008, when the main research was conducted, there were around 400 Europe Direct information relays in the EU in total, of which 52 were situated in Germany. With the beginning of the new funding period (2009-2012), the European Commission succeeded in extending this network.

recent years (e.g. Cohen, 1997; Dryzek, 2000; Gutman et. al., 2004; Habermas, 1996).

In consideration of these elements, the research question addressed in this thesis will therefore be:

Are Europe Direct information relays an adequate means to fight the perceived democratic deficit?

Numerous elements deserve to be highlighted and examined in connection with this question, such as democratic-theoretical or communication-theoretical dimensions. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, however, the focus will be on the functionality of the Europe Direct information relays as the relays are exposed to a number of factors that affect their mediating function. For instance, they are heavily dependent on the body that operates the relay, the so-called host structures, which allows those bodies to exert a certain degree of influence over the relays. The relays are obliged to comply with the Commission's guidelines and action plans. Moreover, they rely on the Commission's service offers and communication with the Commission. Thus, this thesis sets out to investigate the factors that hinder – or help – the relays in fulfilling their mediating function.

The following sub-questions will guide the research:

1. What is the perceived democratic deficit?

To begin with, it is essential to outline the underlying problem, which is the assumption that the EU is suffering from a perceived democratic deficit.

2. What needs to be done to fight the perceived democratic deficit?

It needs to be established what people need to be equipped with in order to actively participate in a political decision-making setting. Therefore, concepts of 'political knowledge' and 'deliberative democracy' will be introduced.

3. What does the EU do to decrease the perceived democratic deficit?

Here, the communication strategy of the European Commission will be introduced, of which Europe Direct information relays are thought to be a key feature.

4. **Do the activities of the Europe Direct information relays meet the criteria identified to be adequate means to counter the perceived democratic deficit?**

Question 2 outlined two concepts which are adequate means to fight the perceived democratic deficit. In a next step it will be established whether the activities of the relays match the two concepts.

5. **What are the factors that hinder or help the relays in fulfilling their mediating function?**

Finally, factors that impact on the relays' role and are therefore also pivotal in determining whether they are an adequate tool to fight the perceived democratic deficit will be examined.

1.1 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

To my knowledge, no scientific research has yet been published about Europe Direct information relays. Although there have been information offices in most member states for a number of years, the Europe Direct network is a fairly new phenomenon, having been introduced only in 2005. An evaluation of the network's work has been announced by the Commission for 2009 but no final date has been set.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE AND AIM OF RESEARCH

Because of this lack of previous research and scientific publications, as well as the interesting nature of the relays and their dual role, the Europe Direct network constitutes an excellent object of research. As it has been launched to play a key role in the Commission's endeavours to fight the perceived democratic deficit, it is vital to highlight its strengths, uncover possible shortcomings and give suggestions on how to improve its performance.

This thesis aims at establishing whether the Europe Direct network is an adequate tool to fight the perceived democratic deficit, putting particular emphasis on the functionality of the relays. The focus will thereby be on the relationship between the relays and the European Commission as the initiator of this network. Ultimately, the thesis aims at identifying factors – based on the relays' relationship with the Commission – that have an impact on the relays' mediating function.

1.3 STRUCTURE

To begin with, the perceived democratic deficit will be identified as it forms the basis to our research. In a next step, it will be analysed what needs to be done to adequately tackle this problem. In this context, the two theoretical concepts of 'political knowledge' and 'deliberative democracy' will be introduced. This will be followed by an introduction of what the EU does to fight the perceived democratic deficit. The Europe Direct network will be introduced next, as it plays a key role in this strategy. It will further be analysed whether the function of the relays meets the criteria identified to be adequate means to counter the perceived democratic deficit. Finally, the mediating function of the relays will be scrutinised paying particular attention to a selection of factors that have an impact on the relays' work. In this context, data collected from a questionnaire, which has been made available online to the 52 German European Direct information relays of the old funding period, will be analysed. As the empirical research conducted is both quantitative and qualitative in nature, the quantitative data from the questionnaires will be complemented with qualitative data obtained from interviews with selected relays.

2. THE PERCEIVED DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The assumption that the EU suffers from a perceived democratic deficit, is the initial point of our research. An academic debate has evolved over the last decades elaborating various aspects and dimensions of the so-called democratic deficit. A vast amount of academic literature has been written about this subject with some persistently denying the existence or relevance of the alleged democratic deficit (e.g. Majone, 1998; Moravcsik, 2002). However, a distinction needs to be made between the *actual* or *real* democratic deficit and the *perceived* democratic deficit. The alleged *real* democratic deficit first and foremost refers to the institutional set-up of the EU. The *perceived* democratic deficit, on the other hand, is more difficult to depict, as subjective parameters come to the fore. Therefore, this type of deficit is related to people's perception, i.e. to what they think, feel and assume, rather than concrete facts.

This chapter aims at identifying the characteristics of the perceived democratic deficit, in order to establish what needs to be done to adequately tackle this problem. To begin with, a brief summary of the main arguments featured in the academic debate on the democratic deficit will precede the analysis of the perceived democratic deficit's symptoms and causes.

2.1 THE ACTUAL DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

According to Zweifel, the democratic deficit arguments of the academic debate can be categorized under five broad headings (Zweifel, 2002: 12):

1. Lack of Legitimacy
2. Lack of Transparency
3. Lack of Accountability
4. Lack of Consensus
5. Lack of Protection

A sixth category needs to be added:

6. Lack of continuity (König, 2007)

In the following section, each one of these six categories will be briefly outlined.

Lack of Transparency. It has often been claimed that decision-making within the EU institutions is not transparent enough. The Council of Ministers, for instance, has often been criticised as an “over-secretive body” reaching agreements away from the public eye (Hayes-Renshaw, 2002: 65).

Lack of Accountability. Lack of transparency also has an impact on the accountability of institutions: John McCormick defines the ‘democratic deficit’ as “the gap between the powers of European institutions and the ability of European citizens to influence their work and decisions” (McCormick, 2005: 135). Although the role of the European Parliament has improved immensely over the past decades, it remains the only directly-elected body of the EU. Moreover, many agencies or indeed institutions involved in the EU decision-making process are appointed without public involvement, such as the European Court of Justice (Burley and Mattli, 1993).

Lack of Consensus. It has been argued that it has become increasingly impossible to reach agreements and decisions based on consensus. However, Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) has been deemed unfair by some scholars as voting weights are based on population, which grants an unfair advantage to countries with a high population (Bindseil and Handke, 1997).

Lack of Protection. Scharpf claims that negative integration will lead to a race to the bottom. He states that “[w]ith the completion of the internal market national governments are no longer able to continue the social and welfare state policies that their citizens have come to take for granted and continue to demand” (Scharpf, 1997: 28).

Lack of Continuity. König highlights “the temporal restriction of political authority and power” (König, 2007: 412) as one of the major problems of the EU as directives usually emanate from a two-stage law-making process. The decision-making process can take up to two years, which means that one directive is likely to be adopted by one government but executed by another.

Lack of Legitimacy. Scharpf argues that the EU ultimately lacks input legitimacy (referring to the participatory qualities of the decision-making process) because there is no European demos and little collective European identity, which he sees as pre-conditions for an effective participatory democracy on the European level (Scharpf, 1999).

All six categories contribute to the democratic deficit. Crombez, however, argues that scholars tend to focus too much on the political process itself rather than the results of it to explain said democratic deficit. Citizens, he says, are more interested in “the output of the political process“, not so much in how these results come into being (Crombez, 2003: 103-104). The *perceived* democratic deficit, therefore, draws on assumptions, feelings and perceptions based on the output, which makes it very difficult to grasp.

2.2 THE *PERCEIVED* DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT: SYMPTOMS

The best way to understand the *perceived* democratic deficit is to analyse statistical data that has been collected by the EU. Since 1974, the EU has published the Eurobarometer (EB) twice a year in which data is analysed from all member states. In Spring 2000 (EB 53) the Eurobarometer for the first time enquired about the image of the EU: The bleak conclusion of the first results published of the latest EB (Nr. 70, December 2008) is that “[t]he positive image of the EU is on the decline” (EB 70, 2008: 47). Only 45% of the people surveyed have a positive image of the EU – seven percentage points less than at the temporary peak in 2000. Instead, a trend towards a “more neutral and cautious view” of the EU is observed (EB 70, 2008: 47). The results refer to the average of all European member states taken together, and there are, of course, differences between member states, with some having a considerably better and some a considerably worse image. Romanians currently have the most positive image of the EU (63%), followed by Ireland (59%). The United Kingdom (UK) has by far the most negative image of the EU, with only 24% stating that they have a positive image. Next to last – by a large margin – is

Turkey, where just 41% have a positive image. Germany (48%) can claim to be positioned at least above average (EB 70, 2008: 42).

Support for membership proves to be similar. Asked whether, generally speaking, membership of the EU is a good thing (as opposed to a bad thing, or neither good nor bad), 53% agreed (EB 70, 2008: 31). Overall, the Eurobarometer concludes that the “decline in positive views on membership of the EU in Spring 2008 has stabilised” (EB 70, 2008: 31): The Dutch are top of the leader board with eight out of ten people believing that membership is something positive, at the bottom we find Latvia (27%), with Germany ranking eighth with 64% (EB 70, 2008: 32).

Graphs showing the long-term development of EU citizens' image of the EU and support for EU membership adapted from the Eurobarometer 70 can be found in the Appendix 9.1. They are testimony of the dimensions of the perceived democratic deficit. In the following paragraphs we will seek an explanation for what may be the cause of the perceived democratic deficit.

2.3 THE *PERCEIVED* DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT: CAUSES

De Vreese has argued that a lack of communication contributes to the democratic deficit, whereby *lack of communication* refers to the inability of the EU to communicate with the broad public. He highlights in particular the shortcomings of EU topics in the media and the negative nature of EU news coverage (de Vreese, 2003). It seems that communication and the access to information does indeed play an important role.

Wiener and Dietz argue that “[w]hat is missing is the ‘enlightened understanding’ among citizens that is considered to be a prerequisite for a democratic process” (Wiener and Dietz, 2004: 111), referring to one of Dahl’s five criteria for an ideal democratic process (Dahl 1989). McCormick also highlights what he refers to as the ‘knowledge deficit’:

“It will be difficult for Europeans to develop a sense of belonging to the European Union if they continue to know so little about it, and as long as they know so little, they will not make their views known about its work. This will perpetuate the democratic deficit, and decisions will continue to be taken by a policy elite of national leaders and Eurocrats” (McCormick, 2005: 136).

This is also known to the European Commission as the Eurobarometer 68 came to the same conclusion, namely that “[...] there is a clear correlation between the various indicators regarding support for and knowledge of the European Union” (EB 68, 2008: 101). In the same issue they state that “Europeans feel that their compatriots suffer from a significant information deficit as regards European political affairs” (EB 68, 2008: 160). Asked whether they felt that they were generally well informed or not about European political affairs, only 18% stated that they were very well or well informed, with 56% stating that they were not well informed. 22% even said that they were not informed at all (EB 68, 2008: 160). This is a change for the worse compared with the previous EB issue, where 22% claimed to feel very well or well informed as opposed to 55% who claimed not to be very well informed (EB 67, 2007: 120). However, the surveyors feel that EU citizens might simply be too pessimistic as the actual objective knowledge is not as bad as people usually assume (EB 68, 2008: 160). The objective knowledge is in fact improving (EB 67, 2008: 130): 80% of all participants could answer at least one of three quiz questions correctly. However, only one in five Europeans were capable of answering all three questions correctly. For all 27 member states that results in an average of correct answers of 50%. Again, Germany ranks slightly above average, with 54% of answers correct (EB 67, 2008: 130).

Apart from the apparent lack of perceived and actual knowledge, another problem has been highlighted. As decision-making power has been gradually transferred to the supranational level, little opportunity has been left for EU citizens to actively participate and deliberate matters of their concern. Effectively, the control over things has been taken out of citizens’ hands. As touched upon in chapter 2.1, these concerns are linked to the lack of transparency, accountability and input legitimacy: The Commission as the quasi-executive of the EU is not elected by the people. Yet people are more and more affected by EU regulations with directives reaching into various spheres of their lives. Therefore, it is problematic that people do not have the opportunity to effectively debate and influence decisions taken on the supranational level².

² “Für die Bürger öffnet sich damit die Schere zwischen Betroffensein und Teilnahme immer weiter. Eine zunehmende Zahl von supranational beschlossenen Maßnahmen betrifft immer mehr Bürger in immer weiteren Lebensbereichen. Da die Staatsbürgerrolle bisher nur nationalstaatlich institutionalisiert ist, haben aber die Bürger keine effektiven Möglichkeiten, europäische Entscheidungen zu thematisieren und zu beeinflussen“ (Habermas 1994, cited in: Knorr, 2006: 12).

In his study on the possibility of a Europeanised public sphere, Koopmans has examined how “European integration has affected the opportunities of different collective actors to intervene in public debates and achieve public visibility” (Koopmans, 2007: 184). Importantly, he comes to the conclusion that there is a correlation between discursive influence and Euro-scepticism:

“As a general rule, actors who are less influential in Europeanised public debates tend also to be more critical of European institutions and less supportive of the integration process than actors whose voices are more prominent in Europeanised public debates” (Koopmans, 2007: 206).

Koopmans has shown that European integration and the resulting Europeanisation of public debate remains an elitist project, the beneficiaries being almost exclusively members of the political elite. Civil society interests are mostly underrepresented, proving that there is a clear public deficit which to some is at the heart of the democratic deficit (Machill et. al., 2006: 60).

2.4 SYNOPSIS

To sum up, the *perceived* democratic deficit is linked to the actual democratic deficit, yet more difficult to grasp as it is based on subjective feelings and perceptions on the part of the citizens. Two main causes for the perceived democratic deficit can be identified as follows:

1. There is a correlation between the level of knowledge on EU related issues and the image of the EU: **The less knowledgeable people are, the less positive is their image of the EU.**
2. There is also a correlation between access to deliberation and Euro-scepticism: **Actors that are less influential in Europeanised public debates are often more critical of the EU.**

3. HOW TO FIGHT THE PERCEIVED DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT?

Arguably, two elements are at the heart of the perceived democratic deficit: lack of political knowledge and lack of access to deliberation. An adequate means to fight the perceived democratic deficit would therefore be an instrument suitable to address the shortcomings outlined above. Ideally, this instrument would incorporate elements of either deliberation or enhancement of political knowledge by, for instance, providing access to information. The suitability of the instrument would be drastically increased if it dealt with more than just one of these elements.

Both the concept of political knowledge and the concept of deliberation are cornerstones in the arena of democratic theory. Logically, these two concepts should play a prominent role in the fight against the perceived democratic deficit having been identified as adequate means. In the following chapter it will be explained why.

3.2 CONCEPT I: POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

“In a democracy, knowledge is power” – with this concise statement Jerit et. al. begin their study on the education-knowledge relationship and the importance of the information environment (Jerit et. al., 2006: 266). Grönlund, on the other hand, claims that “[p]olitical information is a central aspect to democracy” (Grönlund, 2007: 397). Knowledge and political information – two concepts that very often seem to be used synonymously (Hill, 2005), are at the centre of our understanding of ‘political knowledge’. Lupia and McCubbins, however, make a clear distinction between the two concepts, defining ‘information’ as data or facts, and ‘knowledge’ as people’s “ability to make accurate predictions” (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998: 24).

Information and, indeed, the availability of information play a major role in the acquisition of political knowledge (Jerit et. al., 2006: 267). Information, and most importantly access to it, is a prerequisite for political knowledge. People need to gain access to information in order to form an opinion, make judgments, through which they ultimately gain knowledge. However, we need to appreciate that how we learn – gain knowledge – is influenced by already existing stereotypes or assumptions. People certainly are exposed to the predisposition of their information source of choice, such as newspapers, TV programmes or information pools like Europe Direct. After all, “public opinion is primarily a moralised and codified version of the facts” (Lippmann, 1949: 125).

The importance of information is also captured in the variety of definitions that exist of the word 'knowledge'. Delli Carpini et. al. define political knowledge "as the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory" (Delli Carpini et. al., 1996: 10). However, they admit that 'factual knowledge' alone is not sufficient as people still need to be able to reason and develop a passion for politics (Delli Carpini et. al., 1996: 5). Therefore, we prefer the definition put forward by Hill, who proposes the following simple equation (Hill, 2005: 30):

$$\text{Knowledge} = \text{Information} + \text{Judgement}$$

This interaction between factual information, information processing and judgment of it, is mirrored in Dahl's comprehensive term of "enlightened understanding" (Dahl, 1989: 111; Dahl, 1998: 37-38), which he names as one of five prerequisites necessary to ensure the ideal democratic process. He argues that in order to "know what it wants, or what is best, the people must be enlightened, at least to some degree". He adds that "advocates of democracy have invariably recognised this and placed great stress on the means to an informed and enlightened demos, such as education and public discussion" and urges that "citizens ought to have the opportunity to acquire an understanding of these matters" (Dahl, 1989: 111-112).

This is a view shared by Delli Carpini et. al., as they are convinced that "better informed citizens are significantly more likely to participate in politics" (Delli Carpini et. al., 1996: 19). In their view, political knowledge is "an instrumental good that helps to enlighten one's self-interest and to translate it into effective political actions" (Delli Carpini et. al., 1996: 218). Moreover, "the value of political knowledge is collective", meaning that "[b]roader participation increases the legitimacy of the government and provides it with greater authority to act on behalf of society's interests" (Delli Carpini et. al., 1996: 219). At the same time, however, they are convinced that the "systematic biases in the ability, opportunity and motivation to learn about politics produce a stratified political system that affords different access to political power" (Delli Carpini et. al., 1996: 3). Other scholars before them have already argued that gaining political knowledge is influenced by different variables or predictors, such as intelligence, education or age (Luskin, 1990), or indeed exposure to mass media and location with regards to the type of knowledge acquired (Lambert et. al., 1988).

Significantly, there is a link between political knowledge and deliberation. Hansen, for instance, states that several studies have demonstrated that “deliberation increases political knowledge” (Hansen, 2007: 377). A study by Bennett et. al. examining data from the UK and the United States, on the other hand, shows that there is “a statistically significant relationship between engaging in political conversations and being more knowledgeable about government and public affairs” (Bennett et. al., 2000: 115). Thus, the more people talk about politics, the more knowledgeable they are – although the quality of those political conversation surely is a determining factor as well. More importantly, however, they come to the conclusion that this relationship remains “statistically significant even with the effects of other important predictors of political knowledge taken into account”, such as the ones named above (Bennett et. al., 2000: 117). Equally, knowledge is a vital requisite of ‘deliberative democracy’³.

3.3 CONCEPT II: DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Deliberation is another important aspect in the field of democratic theory and is supposed to take place in the public sphere. Public sphere is a forum of communication or discourse to all those who want to contribute something to the political debate or just want to listen to what other people have to say about it (Neidhardt, 1994: 7). Habermas gradually developed his Discourse Theory, which revolves around deliberation and has become the central point of reference for deliberative democratic theorists⁴. As outlined in *Between Facts and Norms* (1992: 359-366), it is based on elements of both the republican and the liberal model of democracy. Although Habermas criticises both models, it can be argued that he is closest to the republican model of democracy. However, he particularly criticises its “move towards an ethical constriction of political discourse” (Habermas, 1996: 23). By this he means that the republicans give public communication a communitarian reading by emphasising the interest of society and of the community as a whole over the interest of the individual citizen. In his view, such an understanding is far too idealistic, as in this kind of setting the fate of the democratic process depends completely on the people’s virtues.

³ “Die Erzeugung legitimen Rechts durch deliberative Politik stellt [...] ein problemlösendes Verfahren dar, **das Wissen benötigt und verarbeitet**, um die Regelung von Konflikten und die Verfolgung kollektiver Ziele zu programmieren“ (Habermas, 1992: 386; emphasis added by author).

⁴ The first to coin the term ‘deliberative democracy’ was Joseph Bessette (Bohman, 1998; Dryzek, 2000)

At the heart of deliberative democracy we find the process of will-formation (Habermas, 1992: 361). In a discourse-theoretic interpretation:

“[...] democratic will-formation draws its legitimating force not from a previous convergence of settled ethical convictions but both from the communication presupposition that allow the better arguments to come into play in various forms of deliberation and from the procedures that secure fair bargaining power” (Habermas, 1996: 24).

Following Habermas, deliberation can be put into the following simple equation: Informal public opinion formation generates influence. Influence is transformed into communicative power, which in turn is transformed into administrative power (Habermas, 1996: 28).

Habermas's theory is a normative concept which stresses the all-embracing possibility for everyone to participate in deliberation. In this context, extensive participation is supposed to increase in-put legitimacy. However, other scholars understand deliberative democracy to be an interaction mode ('Interaktionsmodus') within a decision-taking body, stressing the higher potential of such a body of increasing out-put legitimacy (Göler, 2006: 33). Hendriks chooses to label these two sets of proponents macro-deliberative and micro-deliberative democrats (Hendriks, 2002 and 2006): The latter are most concerned with defining the actual conditions and procedures of deliberation, whereas the former are interested in the actual, often unstructured deliberation which takes place in the public sphere. Joshua Cohen, for instance, is – unlike Habermas – a typical micro-deliberative democrat. He defines an “ideal deliberative procedure”, which in his opinion can only be guaranteed through institutions. Consequently, one of the central aims of deliberative democracy, according to Cohen, is “to specify the institutional preconditions for deliberative decision-making” (Cohen, 1997: 79). He believes that an institutionalisation of deliberation is imperative, as without institutions deliberative decisions cannot be obtained. The institutions themselves “must provide the framework for the formation of the will” (Cohen, 1997: 79-80).

The concept of 'deliberative democracy' is, of course, not without its critics. Often it is criticised for its apparent exclusiveness: The late Marion Young has argued that the deliberation process is rather elitist. Groups, such as activists, that prefer ways which are better described as confrontation rather than conversation would be excluded from the public sphere (Young, 2002: 26). Furthermore, general inequalities in society lead to a “hegemonic discourse” (Young, 2001: 685), by which

she means that certain members of society are more dominant than others which makes it difficult for certain groups of society to think critically of alternative actions or solutions. Sanders also criticises the exclusive nature of deliberation. Her case studies show that some groups of society are excluded – or at least disadvantaged – from taking part in the deliberation process. This disadvantage can be based on ethnic background or sex, but also on more profound differences in resources, both economical and intellectual (Sanders, 1997).

These reservations set aside, it is particularly the macro-deliberative approach that is important with regards to being an adequate means to fight the perceived democratic deficit, as it emphasises the normative ideal of all-inclusive participation. Moreover, deliberation is not necessarily about reaching an agreement. Hence, it is vital how disagreement is dealt with. Gutman and Thompson call this the “principle of the economy of moral disagreement” (Gutman and Thompson, 2004: 7) and thereby highlight the principle of “mutual respect”, something which is also featured prominently in Habermas’s Discourse Theory. This effect alone is desirable as it would contribute immensely towards better understanding among citizens as well as them and the decision-making bodies of the EU. This could result in an overall more positive image of the EU.

In many ways, macro-deliberation represents the ideal situation in the sense that – as defined by Peters et. al. – public discourse or deliberation is the argumentative effort of all participants to find a solution to a problem which is acceptable to everyone. Even if no consensus is reached, public deliberation will trigger learning effects which will contribute immensely to the general argumentation, or even transform preferences and convictions, but at least to maintain a certain degree of transparency and respect for controversial positions⁵.

⁵ „Öffentlicher Diskurs oder öffentliche Deliberation bezieht sich (...) auf das argumentative Bemühen von Kommunikationsteilnehmern um kollektiv akzeptierbare Deutungen, Problem- oder Konfliktlösungen. [...] Auch wo ein Konsens nicht erreicht wird, soll öffentliche Deliberation zu Lerneffekten, zu einer Bereicherung des Argumentationshaushalts, zu einer reflexiven Überprüfung und möglicherweise Transformation von Überzeugungen und Präferenzen, zu einem gewissen Maß an Transparenz sowie Verständnis und Respekt für kontroverse Positionen führen“ (Peters et. al.; 2004: 3-4).

3.4 SYNOPSIS

To sum up, political knowledge and deliberation are key to a functioning democracy. As lack of knowledge and lack of access to deliberation have been identified as the major causes for the perceived democratic deficit, a solution to tackle it should therefore involve the concepts of political knowledge and deliberation. Both concepts are adequate means to fight the perceived democratic deficit.

Firstly, the more knowledgeable people are, the more likely they are to actively participate in a political setting. In this connection the access to information is key, something which will be of importance later on in the thesis. Secondly, deliberation is one way of participating in the decision-making process. Public debate both enables people to actively contribute to solving a conflict or bringing about a decision, but most importantly, it also triggers learning effects and establishes a certain degree of transparency even if no consensus is reached. Finally, political knowledge and deliberation feed off of one another: On the one hand, political knowledge is a prerequisite for deliberation; on the other hand, deliberation helps to enhance political knowledge. Ultimately, synergy effects could result from using both concepts together.

4. HOW THE COMMISSION FIGHTS THE PERCEIVED DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

The European Commission is aware of the existence of the perceived democratic deficit and has embarked on a mission to close the gap between Brussels and the citizens of the EU. After the failed referenda on the European Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands, EU officials realised that there was a huge communication deficit and responded to the apparent lack of understanding and negative feelings on part of the majority of the population. As a result, a “period of reflection” was declared when the Heads of States and Government adopted a declaration on “the ratification of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe” on June 17th 2005 (Council Conclusions, 2005).

4.1 PLAN D FOR DEMOCRACY, DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

An “Action Plan to improve Communicating Europe” (Commission 2005 a) was launched a month later in July 2005. Its main objective was “to ensure more effective communication about Europe supported within the Commission by a modern and more professional approach across all departments” (ibid.: 3) with the

overall aim to earn people's trust and interest. A three-fold approach was envisioned that should lead to the right results: Listening, Communication, and Connecting with citizens by 'going local' (ibid.: 4). In a nutshell, this new approach envisions a new relationship between the EU and its citizens: First of all, the EU's policies and activities must be communicated in a way that the citizens can relate to and understand the impact that these policies and activities have on their everyday lives. Secondly, communication is supposed to be understood as "a dialogue, not a one-way street" (ibid.: 4). People should get the chance to express their opinions to the Commission which will then find "direct bearing on EU policy formulation and output" (ibid.: 4). Thirdly, the Commission's communication activities "must be resourced and organised in such a way as to address matching demographic and national and local concerns, and to convey information through the channels citizens prefer in the language they can understand" (ibid.: 4).

A chapter entitled "Better use of tools" (ibid.: 11-14), highlights the free-of-charge Europe Direct phone-line (00 8000 6 7 8 9 10 11) as well as the already existing information points as a "communication channel" but also as "a way of obtaining direct feedback from citizens on their interests and concerns" (ibid.: 13). Furthermore, the plan is announced to 'network' all already existing information points, which will be run and managed by the Directorate General (DG) for Communication (Action 26) as well as promoted by it through a substantial marketing campaign (Action 30) (ibid.: 13, 26 and 30).

This communication to the Commission resulted in "Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate" (Commission 2005 b), a communication from the Commission presented to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, in October of the same year. Its purpose was to encourage "a broad and intensive debate on European policies", as "[a]ny vision of the future of Europe needs to build on a clear view on citizens' needs and expectations" (ibid.: 2). The EU Commission's Plan D considers the Europe Direct network, which was established in 2005, to be crucial to the success of the aims set out, among which is stimulating a wider public debate. This document claims that a "decentralised network of local information relays has been put in place by the Commission in partnership with regional and local host structures" (ibid.: 8). This network is praised as a "valuable tool for communicating Europe to the citizens on the ground and for implementing the Commission's approach to communication activities" (ibid.: 8).

Both the “Action Plan” and “Plan D” aim at ‘closing the gap’ between the EU and its citizens – a gap, which according to the Commission has been “widely recognised” (Commission, 2006). All these efforts resulted in the publication of a “White Paper on a European Communication Policy” (Commission, 2006). The overall aim of the Commission’s communication endeavours is to create a “European Public Sphere” (ibid.: 4), something which can be achieved best through a “partnership approach” (ibid.: 2). The media and use of technology are highlighted in this respect (ibid.: 8), as are creating valuable and efficient partnerships, embracing the member states, EU institutions, local and regional authorities political parties and civil society organisations in equal measure (ibid.: 11-12). The White Paper, however, does not deliver any concrete measures, it merely “outlines the challenge and how it might be met” (ibid.: 13).

In October 2007, the Commission reported first successes in its Communication “Communicating Europe in Partnership” (Commission, 2007), also mentioning Europe Direct information relays. It is furthermore announced that the Commission is planning “to launch a call for proposals to renew the network across the EU-27”, in order to further “improve geographical coverage and ensure that relays can provide information on communication priorities as well as on other issues which are essential for citizens” (ibid.: 7).

Finally, in 2008, the Commission published “Debate Europe – building on the experience of Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate” (Commission, 2008 a). It heralds the third phase of the Commission’s Plan D, namely ‘debate’ (ibid.: 6). The latest political declaration in this matter is “Communicating Europe in Partnership” (Commission, 2008 b), which is a declaration issued last October by all three EU institutions – the European Commission, European Parliament, and the Council. Again, the importance of communication is stressed and the desire expressed to streamline communication priorities for the EU as a whole. For the first time, the three institutions agreed to place emphasis on the following issues for 2009⁶ together: European Parliament Elections 2009, climate protection, as well as growth and employment (EU-Nachrichten 01/2009: 6).

⁶ The so-called communication priorities used to be issued by the European Commission alone. To my knowledge, such communication priorities were first published for the year 2006.

Overall, Plan D aims at improving the Commission's communication with the citizens of the EU member states, by applying a dual approach: The subject 'EU' needs to be made more accessible for the people by going local, thereby giving people the opportunity to engage with the subject locally. Information about the EU and related subjects should be made more transparent and accessible. Furthermore, people get a chance to actively join in the debate encouraged by the Commission to contribute with ideas and feedback. In general, the Commission employs many different tools and instruments, which aim at improving communication between the various levels: Among others, an online "Debate Europe" forum (www.europa.eu/debateeurope/index_en.htm) was launched, which invites citizens to join in the debate and give views on the challenges Europe is facing today. At the same time, Commissioners are encouraged to establish more contacts with national parliamentarians, NGOs and the media (Wallström, 2006). The instrument, however, that is most promising with regards to the Commission's strategy is the Europe Direct network, which was established in 2005 after the Commission had called for proposals in 2004. Wallström, head of DG Communication and vice-president of the European Commission, stresses that "Europe Direct Relays have a key role to play in the success of Plan D (as) [t]hey enable an important section of the population to be reached at regional or local level" (Wallström, 2006: 4).

4.2 EUROPE DIRECT INFORMATION RELAYS

The Europe Direct network is mentioned time and again in the many publications regarding Plan D and the Commission's communication strategy. Arguably, they are one of the Commission's main instruments in its endeavours to 'close the gap' as they fully incorporate the Commission's strategy – bringing information to people locally and providing a platform for debate. In order to establish whether the network is an adequate means to fight the perceived democratic deficit, its set-up and workings will be outlined in order to analyse whether the network matches the criteria sketched out above with regards to being an adequate means.

4.2.1 A DEFINITION

In short, Europe Direct information relays are a service offered by host structures to the local population. The host structures lead the project on their own responsibility (DG Communication, 2005 a: 4). The user manual distributed to all Europe Direct relays for the previous funding period defines Europe Direct as a decentred instrument which offers a citizen-friendly service (ibid.). This service enables EU citizens to get information, advice and support as well as answers to any questions they might have regarding EU legislation, policies, programmes and financing options. Furthermore, citizens have the opportunity to give feedback to the institutions of the EU in the form of questions, statements and proposals. Overall, this service provided by the host structure should enable the European Commission to distribute specific information locally which is tailored to people's needs (ibid.).

The EU Commission's official website defines the role of Europe Direct information relays as follows:

“EUROPE DIRECT information relays act as an interface between EU and its citizens at local level. The mission of the network is to distribute information and advice about the European Union's policies, actively promote local and regional debate about the European Union, allow the European institutions to disseminate local and regional information and give the public the opportunity to send feedback to the European Union institutions“ (www.ec.europa.eu A).

The representations to the Commission in the respective countries are responsible for the coordination of this network and also act as contact person to the individual relays. In the case of Germany, these are the representations in Munich, Berlin and Bonn, whereby each representation is responsible for a certain part of Germany: The representation in Munich is responsible for Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg; Bonn for North-Rhine Westphalia, Hessen, Rhineland Palatinate; and the main representation in Berlin for the rest.

4.2.2 ORIGINS

The Europe Direct network is a fairly new development within the general communication strategy of the EU. Its roots, however, go back to 1998 when the European Commission launched Europe Direct as a permanent call centre, which would give European citizens the opportunity to gain information on any EU related issue. In 2004, the European Commission launched an appeal via its representations asking institutions to apply to become a host structure to a Europe

Direct information relay. A Commission Decision was adopted accordingly in 2004 establishing the legal framework for the award of grants for the period 2005-2008 (C(2004) 2869). The Commission planned to create a geographically balanced network of relays throughout the member states, in order to “meet the information demand of both the urban and rural population” (DG Communication, 2005 b: 2). The idea of having local information points for EU citizens, however, was not entirely new. The predecessors of the relays were so-called Carrefours and Info-Points, the former being geared towards rural areas and the latter towards cities and urban areas. Their funding was discontinued at the end of 2004 and the offices replaced by the unified Europe Direct network. Since January 2009, there are around 480 relays in the whole of the EU, 59 of which are situated in Germany (EU Nachrichten, 01/2009: 4). The map on the right shows the geographical coverage of Europe Direct information relays in Germany in 2008. An up-to-date version with notations can be found in the Appendix 9.2.



Map 1: Europe Direct Network, Germany, 2008 (source: www.ec.europa.eu B)

4.2.3 SET -UP

Public sector bodies or private-law bodies with a public mission were eligible to apply for an annual operating grant and technical assistance in return for hosting a Europe Direct information relay. These so-called host structures needed to contribute 50% of the total amount allocated to the relays, i.e. they must at least match the subsidy amount, which was limited to EUR 24,000 per year during the last funding period and slightly increased to EUR 25,000 for the new period 2009-2012⁷ (DG Communication, 2005 b; EU Nachrichten, 01/2009: 3).

⁷ The grant offered to the host structure for the new funding period, which is paid out in lump sum, ranges from a minimum of EUR 12,000 to a maximum of EUR 25,000. For 2009, the Commission expects to pay out a total of EUR 11,400,000 for the co-financing of selected host structures. Interestingly, “[t]he allocation of budget per Member State will be based on the distribution of Member State seats in the European Parliament, geographical area of each Member State, as well as ensuring continuity with the first term of the Europe Direct centres network” (European Commission, 2008 c: 6).

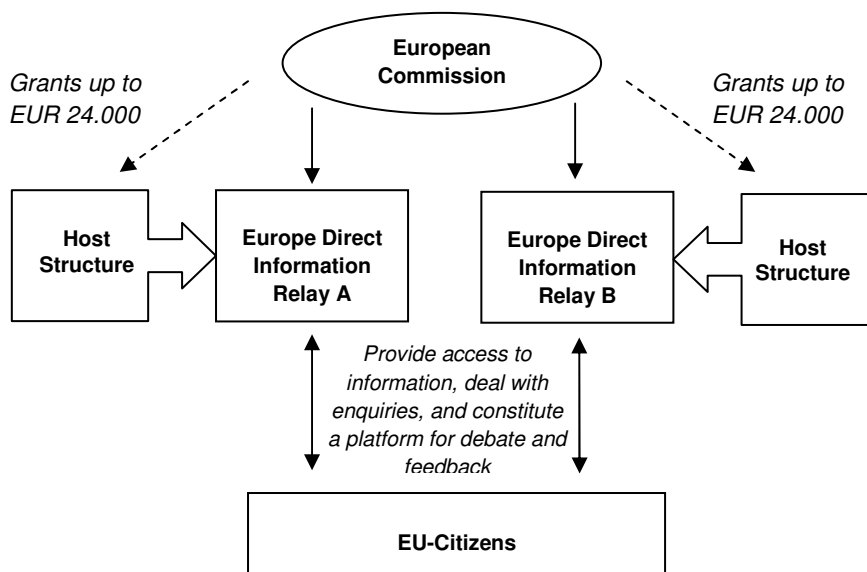


Figure 1: Europe Direct information relays (source: own illustration)

In Germany the host structures were both subject to private- as well as to public-law during the first funding period. Host structures subject to private-law usually are registered associations (German abbreviation: e.V.), such as Europa-Union e.V., Akademie für ländliche Räume e.V., Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Förderung politischer, sozialer und kultureller Beziehungen e.V., Europäische Akademie Mecklenburg e.V., Euroregion Pro Europa Viadrina e.V., Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung, Europa-Haus Leipzig e.V., Andreas-Hermes Akademie e.V., or the Sächsische Landeskuratorium Ländlicher Raum e.V.. Exception to that rule is the Dieter Meyer Consulting GmbH which is host structure to a relay in Oldenburg. Host structures subject to public-law are usually affiliated to local or regional administrations, such is the case in, for example, Augsburg, Nuremberg, Karlsruhe, Mannheim, Saarbrücken, Osnabrück, Hannover or Bremen. Sometimes, however, the relays are situated with communal business development agencies which often are limited liability companies (German abbreviation: GmbH) and therewith also subject to private-law, although in most cases the supporting organisation is still the local/regional administration: Stadtwerke Furth im Wald GmbH, Wirtschaftsfördergesellschaft Schwäbisch Hall, GEWION Trier, Gfw – Gesellschaft für Wirtschaftsförderung im Kreis Warendorf mbH, or West mbH – Wirtschaftsförderungs- und Entwicklungsgesellschaft Steinfurt mbH.

4.2.4 DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The European Commission has distributed a user manual (DG Communication, 2005 a) which outlines the basic rules and expectations in terms of technical, contractual and service-related aspects.

The host structure plays an important part in this joint-venture: It needs to provide rooms and basic technical facilities, such as telephones, printers, computers, and photocopiers, as well as sufficient numbers of skilled employees who can support the relay during office hours (DG Communication, 2005 a: 17). The relays have to take care themselves regarding advertising their services and activities locally, by means of taking out advertisements in local newspapers as well as promoting their activities on their own website and producing brochures and leaflets (ibid.: 18). A 'pro-active' approach towards the media is key and newspapers and media representatives should be regularly informed about events and activities planned (ibid.: 20). The relays are thereby often reliant on further financial assistance granted by the host structure.

For the previous funding period (2005-2008), the individual relays were obliged to sign a framework contract as well as a short work plan in which all the activities planned for the entire period had to be sketched out. This work plan had to be accepted both by the Commission in Brussels as well as the representation in Munich, which deals with all contractual matters regarding the Europe Direct network. Besides that, each relay had to sign an additional agreement concerning the running costs and the financial contribution by the Commission to these running costs. This agreement was signed once the annual work plan and the annual financial plan had been accepted (ibid.: 6). However, the relays can file a modification application towards the end of each year if there have been changes to the previously submitted budget.

When submitting the work programme to the Commission, specific information needs to be provided, such as the main aims of the relay, as well as the methods anticipated to be used to achieve these goals and a provisional time schedule. Furthermore, the target groups and their specific information demands needed to be identified, as well as how this information was established. Measures and instruments to be used needed to be outlined, whereby the Commission expects the relays to follow so-called communication priorities (ibid.: 9).

In terms of the relays' mission, the employees of the relays are expected to offer services which are oriented towards their target group and provide information which matches the people's needs and expectations, their age, language skills etc. Officially, the relay is expected to work for the people of Europe and not for their host structure (ibid.: 18-19). Furthermore, the Commission wants the relays to forward any information regarding citizens' feedback and expectations that might be of interest to the Commission. As stated above, the relays are urged to follow communication priorities when staging events. These priorities have been decided on by the Commission in the past, with all EU institutions pursuing their own communication goals. For 2009, however, the Commission, Council and European Parliament have issued communication priorities jointly for the first time. These communication priorities are the same for all relays across Europe and it is up to the relays to adapt them to the local situation. This way, the relays can adjust their activities to the needs of the population, yet follow a central communication theme. Equally, the Commission makes available a number of services that can be used by the relays. Among those services are an online bookshop, through which the relays can order brochures and information material; and an online Help Desk, which serves as an online platform for all relays to post events, publications, as well as lodge enquiries themselves and submit monthly reports on their performance. This Help Desk was launched in 2006 and the relays are urged to frequently inform the Commission about their events and activities.

4.2.5 DUAL FUNCTION

Europe Direct information relays have two main functions: On the one hand, they are supposed to provide citizens with information on the EU, its institutions or other EU related issues. They are there to provide guidance and respond to enquiries. On the other hand, the relays constitute an arena in which citizens are invited to join in a dialogue with each other and, more importantly, with the institutions of the EU. The relays are urged by the Commission to forward feedback, such as concerns, ideas and comments by the citizens to the Commission in order to enable the Commission to adapt its offers accordingly.

This suggests that the relays have a dual role assuming a mediating function:

1. Improving EU citizens' level of knowledge
2. Enhancing debate between citizens and the EU institutions.

To fulfil this role, the relays usually offer a number of services, which are more or less dictated by the European Commission (DG Communication, 2005 a: 20). First and foremost, they provide information to citizens in form of advice or one of the numerous information brochures provided by the institutions and which are available to the relays via the online bookshop. Their help can be more specific, by lending support to local actors who wish to take part in an EU project. Through their network contacts they can help people to find partners for such projects or directly take part in EU projects themselves.

Another important concern to many relays is the promotion of regional economic development. The role of the relay in this respect is both passive and active: On the one hand, it can provide information to local actors about EU-funding or re-direct the corresponding enquiries to other bodies. However, in some cases – depending on capacity and specialisation – relays can also help local actors to draft concepts or even write applications.

In rare cases, the relays can also draft and publish their own publications if they realise that material for a certain target group is missing. These publications are then made available to other relays via the Help Desk. The main priority is, however, to reach as many people as possible. In order to do this, the relays organise events to which the local population is invited. These can be panel discussions, or educational trips to Brussels catered to a specific target group, such as pensioners, young people, or immigrants. Generally, relays seek to acquire multipliers who can then pass on their knowledge and positive image of the EU to other people. Therefore, some relays seek to work a lot with pupils, or offer seminars to teachers on how to introduce EU related topics into the curriculum.

5. THE MEDIATOR: EUROPE DIRECT UNDER SCRUTINY

We have previously established that an adequate means to tackle the perceived democratic deficit would include one or more of the following elements:

1. access to information
2. active enhancement of people's political knowledge
3. access to and promotion of deliberation.

The description of the Europe Direct network revealed that the relays are embedded in the general communication strategy of the European Commission, assuming a mediating function. In order to better visualise the relays' mediating function, Shannon and Weaver's communication model will be applied.

5.1 COMMUNICATION MODEL BY SHANNON AND WEAVER

Shannon and Weaver have introduced a communication model as part of their mathematical theory of communication in the late 1940s (Shannon and Weaver, 1969). This model was never intended to explain human communication. It is instead a mathematical model which intends to explain signal transmission. Shannon and Weaver, both communication engineers, set out to make the technical communication path more efficient. Neither the message nor its meaning play any significant role in this communication model (Beck, 2007: 18). However, in its abstraction it constitutes a valid framework in which to place the Europe Direct information relays:

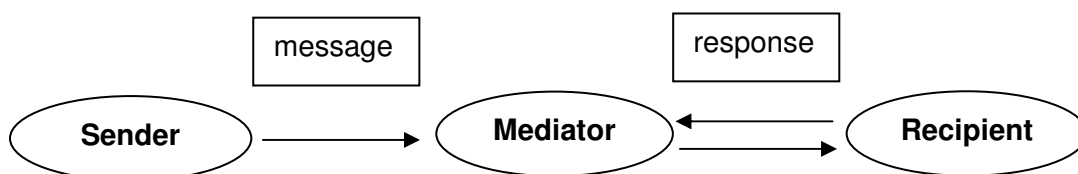


Figure 2: Shannon and Weaver's Communication Model (adapted from Shannon and Weaver, 1969)

In this slightly simplified version, the model consists of a sender, a mediator and a recipient. The sender chooses a message which is then transferred to the recipient. Rather than transmitting the message directly to the recipient, the sender may wish to interpose a mediator. In the process of being transmitted, the message may be altered due to changed connotations, interpretation of the message by the mediator or other instances which may impact the process. These "unwanted editions" or "changes to the transmitted signal" are referred to as "noise" by

Shannon and Weaver (Shannon and Weaver, 1969: 7-8). The same also applies to the original impulse, which reaches the sender and upon which it decides which message to send. If the sender misinterprets the signal then it might translate into the wrong message which may in turn not have the anticipated result. The so-called “coding process” (Shannon and Weaver, 1969: 8) is one of three levels of problems that Weaver had originally identified. He questioned how precisely the transmitted symbols convey the desired meaning, a problem he referred to as the semantic problem (Shannon and Weaver, 1969: 4). Finally, upon receiving the message, the recipient is expected to respond to it. In democratic theory, such an anticipated response would be increased political participation among the citizenry, which is reflected, for instance, in a higher turnout of voters. However, Weaver pinpointed another problem – the effectiveness problem, questioning whether the received meaning would at all affect conduct in the desired way (Shannon and Weaver, 1969: 4). In particular, the semantic problem needs to be kept in mind when applying this model to the Europe Direct network. The effectiveness problem, though equally important, will be neglected here as it is mainly relevant when establishing whether the perceived democratic deficit has actually been reduced based on the relays’ efforts. To answer this undoubtedly intriguing question is far too ambitious for a thesis of this scope.

5.2 SHANNON AND WEAVER’S MODEL APPLIED

Applying Shannon and Weaver’s communication model to the drafted situation, the European Commission is the sender which intends to forward a message to the EU citizens, whereby the Europe Direct network is used as a mediator. The message – information that is supposed to increase the people’s knowledge on EU affairs – should encourage and enable citizens to directly engage in a dialogue with the institutions of the EU, mainly by giving feedback via the mediator.

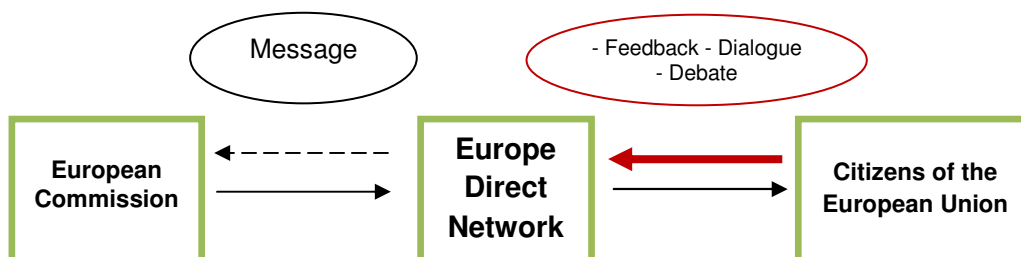


Figure 3: Shannon and Weaver’s communication model applied (adapted from Shannon and Weaver, 1969)

The sender, i.e. the European Commission, is reacting to the overall rather negative attitude towards the EU ('perceived democratic deficit') which represents the original impulse. Importantly, this model reveals four weak points: Firstly, the Commission could misinterpret the original impulse which would result in a wrong message. Secondly, the way the message is transmitted could be flawed or not target-oriented, which could also hamper the success. Thirdly, the mediator could be exposed to outside influences, which could potentially influence or even alter the message through emphasising different parts of it or neglecting others. Finally, even if the message is transmitted perfectly, it is hard to judge whether it will have a lasting impact on the receiver, i.e. it is uncertain whether the perceived democratic deficit will indeed decrease. In the further course of this thesis we will, however, neglect aspects one and four, concentrating on the other two instead.

Bearing in mind Shannon and Weaver's communication model, the following situation now arises: Having a mediating function, two separate relationships can be distinguished for Europe Direct information relays. There is a significant relationship between the relays and the European Commission, as well as between the relays and the public on the other end of the spectrum. As the relays' performance as such and the results thereof are not the focus point of this thesis, the latter relationship will be ranked secondary in favour of the first relationship between the Europe Direct information relays and the European Commission.

5.3 EUROPE DIRECT: DUAL FUNCTION

Let us remind ourselves briefly of the dual role of the Europe Direct network as outlined above:

1. Improving EU citizens' level of knowledge
2. Enhancing debate between citizens and the EU institutions.

We can undoubtedly identify an apparent match between the relays' mediating function and the elements identified to be an adequate means to fight the perceived democratic deficit: Firstly, the relays' information service potentially contributes to people's political knowledge. At the same time they are an arena for deliberation, giving people the opportunity to actively participate in the deliberation process, for instance, by taking part in panel discussions or other events organised by the relays, or by submitting feedback to the institutions in one way or the other.

In chapter 3 we have identified access to information, enhancing people's political knowledge and access to deliberation as adequate means to fight the perceived democratic deficit, as they address the two main shortcomings with regards the perceived democratic deficit. Thus, it is fair to say that the Europe Direct network itself appears, in theory, to be an adequate instrument to fight the perceived democratic deficit. Even more so, since we have identified a correlation between political knowledge and deliberation, which means that combining these two approaches in one institution can lead to great synergy effects. What we now get is a 'magic triangle': each function can help to increase the democratic features of a society, but together they are potentially an even more powerful instrument against the perceived democratic deficit.

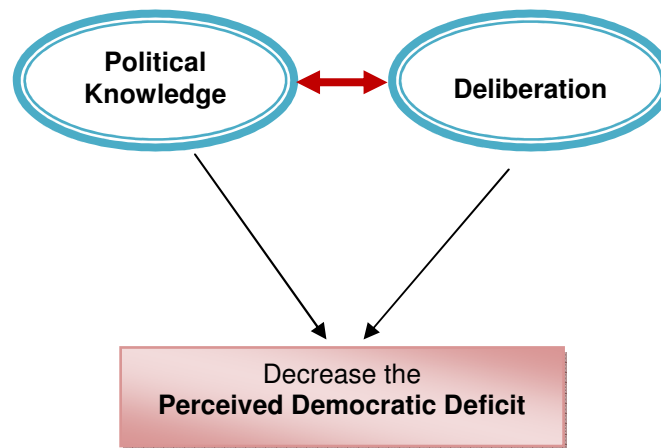


Figure 4: "Magic Triangle" – Synergy Effects due to the relays' dual function (own illustration)

Taking all of the components together, we get the following constellation:

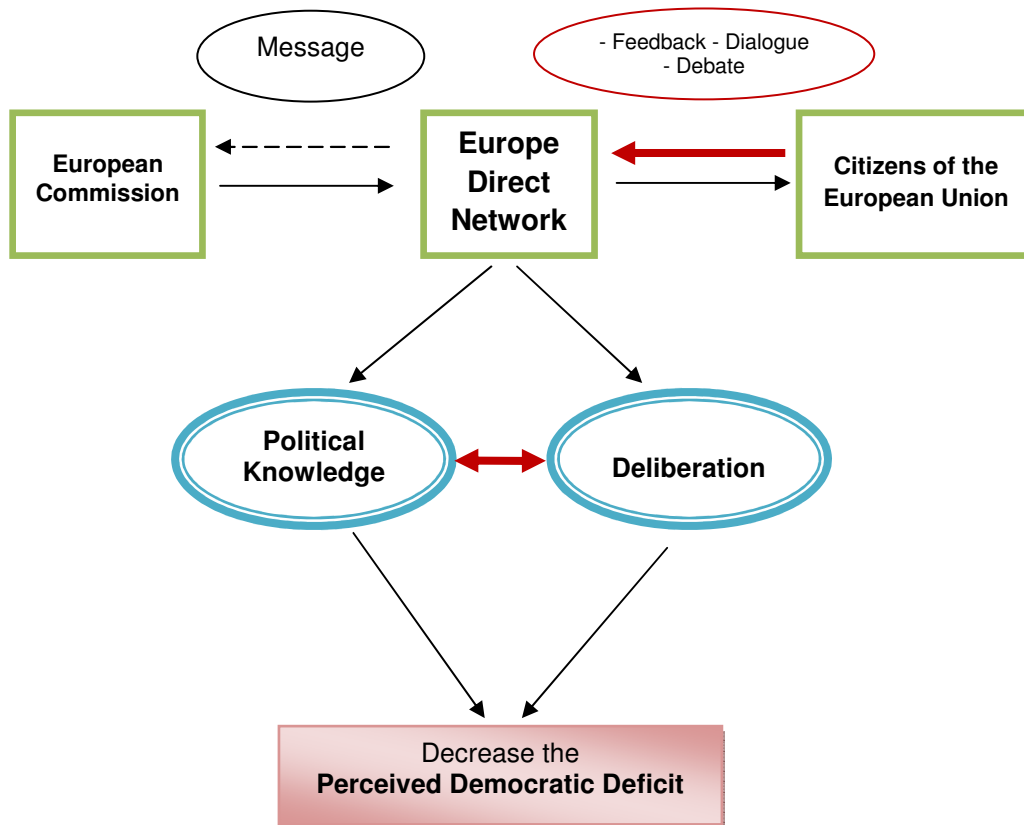


Figure 5: Europe Direct information relays' mediating role assuming a dual function (own illustration, adapted from Shannon and Weaver, 1969)

However, we must ask ourselves whether the Europe Direct network can in practice live up to what it promises in theory. Above we have identified four weak points with regards to the communication framework the network is embedded in due to its mediating function. Two of these weak points are particularly interesting for us: the message as such and outside influences impacting on the mediator. Indeed, the analysis of the relays' set-up and tasks has shown that there are certain independent variables that have an impact on the relays' capacity to fulfil their mediating function. Their influence could directly or indirectly diminish the relays' adequacy in fighting the perceived democratic deficit. Additional empirical research will therefore be needed to establish those factors that hinder – or help – the relays in fulfilling their mediating function.

5.4 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

This chapter has uncovered the relays' crucial dual role: On the one hand, the relays aim at improving the EU citizens' level of knowledge on EU related matters by providing information. On the other hand, they want to enhance debate both among citizens and between them and the EU's institutions. Political knowledge has been repeatedly highlighted as a crucial prerequisite for, or component of, democracy (e.g. Dahl, 1989 and 1998; Delli Carpini, 1996; Grönlund, 2007). The concept of deliberation also plays an important role in democratic theory. Moreover, there is a link between political knowledge and deliberation: Several studies have shown that deliberation increases political knowledge (Bennet et. al., 2000; Lushkin et. al., 2002; Sturgis et. al., 2005) and political knowledge is indeed a requisite of deliberation (Habermas, 1992).

Based on these observations alone, Europe Direct information relays appear to be an adequate means to fight the perceived democratic deficit. However, taking into consideration the relays' set-up, duties and responsibilities, a number of independent variables can be identified that have an impact on the relays' capacity to act. Among these independent variables are the host structure, due to its relationship to the relay, the services offered by the Commission as well as the yearly issued communication priorities.

5.4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

A mix of quantitative and qualitative methods was applied. This particular modus operandi was chosen because of the limited scope of this research, namely to focus on Europe Direct information relays in Germany exclusively. Due to its federal structure and the ensuing differing impact on the relays' host structures, the German Europe Direct network can be singled out. However, the results are therefore not necessarily applicable to the European situation as a whole.

Up until the end of 2008, German EU citizens had access to 52 such relays, which is also the sample of our online questionnaire. In order to further scrutinise the results obtained from this quantitative part of our research, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with carefully selected relays. The data obtained from those interviews will complement the quantitative data.

5.4.1.1 QUANTITATIVE DATA

A questionnaire was designed and made available to all 52 German Europe Direct information relays. It contained 15 questions which were divided into six categories, dealing with the independent variables filtered from the findings presented above (see Appendix 9.3). These variables will be presented in more detail below.

The questionnaire was made available to the participants online via EvaSys, an evaluation software of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Münster, Germany. The clear advantage of an online survey as opposed to more conventional paper-based surveys in this case was the possibility to reach all participants at the same time. Computer and internet access are vital parts of modern office work and the likelihood that the employees would prefer to submit their answers immediately upon receiving the invitation were accordingly high.

The sample consisted of 52 participants, the equivalent of all Europe Direct information relays in operation in Germany in 2008. All relays received an e-mail with instructions on how to access the questionnaire. This e-mail was preceded by an e-mail sent through the project manager of the Europe Direct information relay in Osnabrück, kindly inviting all her colleagues to take part in this survey.

The survey was published online on the 25th of November, 2008. In order to be able to react to possible problems and enquiries, only 15 relays were initially invited to take part, with the remaining 37 following two days later. A reminder was sent to all participants one and a half weeks after the last relays had been invited. When the survey was closed seven weeks later on 13th January 2009, 23 relays had participated, which equates to 44.23% of the sample.

In addition to the online questionnaire, descriptive statistics were obtained by analysing the events organised by all 52 German relays in 2007. The information was gathered through the Help Desk, where we were able to run a search with the following specifications:

- type of event = member events
- country = Germany
- scheduled date = 01/01/07-31/12/07

The result: 609 events for 2007. However, only 37 relays uploaded their events onto this platform and there is no guarantee for the completeness of this information.

5.4.1.2 QUALITATIVE DATA

Based on the findings obtained by the quantitative methods, a semi-structured qualitative interview was developed. Semi-structured interviews were best suitable for this task as they enabled the interviewer to ask specific questions with regards to previous findings as well as to react to the interviewees' answers. The interviewee can be given the opportunity to elaborate further on questions, and the interviewer can better react to answers.

Where possible the interviews were conducted in person, however, on two occasions, the interview was conducted via telephone. The interview partners were chosen based primarily on the host structure of their relay, in order to give a balanced picture. The interviews were all between 45 minutes and one hour long. The chosen interview partners are shown below:

Relay	Interview Partner	Host Structure	Type
Osnabrück	Bianca Mangels	Landkreis Osnabrück	Public-law: public administration
Steinfurt	Annerose Pott, Udo Röllenblech	WEST mbH	Private-law: economic promotion (limited liability company), affiliated with public administration
Hamburg	Bettina Thöring	Europa-Union e.V. (+ support from Hamburg Senate and chamber of commerce)	Private-law: registered association (non-partisan)
Oldenburg	Marlis Pott	Dieter Meyer Consulting GmbH	Private-law: economic promotion (limited liability company), without affiliation with public administration
Dortmund	Dr. Marco Arndt, Heinrich Kühnhenrich	Konrad Adenauer Stiftung e.V.	Private-law: registered association (partisan)

5.4.1.3 INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Three independent variables were identified which are likely to have an impact on the relays' ability to fulfill their mediating function. The table below lists each independent variable and its attributes. Below it will be explained why these variables are key to the relays' ability to perform.

Independent Variable	Attributes
Host structure	Host structures are either public-law bodies or private law bodies with a public mission. The following types of host structure will be examined: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. public-law body: public administration 2. private-law body: limited liability company with strong affiliation with public administration 3. private-law body: limited liability company without affiliation with public administration 4. private-law body: registered non-partisan association 5. private-law body: registered partisan association
Services offered by the European Commission	The European Commission offers a number of services to the Europe Direct network. The following will be examined: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. online bookshop 2. general supply with material (both informational and promotional) 3. Help Desk
Communication priorities	Every year the Commission agrees on a number of communication priorities. The priorities for 2007 were: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prosperity 2. Solidarity 3. Security and Freedom 4. Europe in the World 5. Future of Europe

Host Structure: The host structure is the back-bone of the Europe Direct information relay. The relays are dependent on it financially, because the host structure is obliged to counter finance the project with at least 50% of the total running costs. Due to the differing nature of host structures, they are likely to also have an impact thematically.

Services offered by the Commission: The services offered to the relays by the Commission are vital for the relays' daily work. The degree to which these services meet the needs of the relays will influence the relays' ability to fulfill their mediating function.

Communication Priorities: The communication priorities were introduced by the Commission to streamline communication. The relays are urged to gear their events towards those priorities. While clustering certain topics helps the Commission anchor these topics in the public sphere, they may be too specific to really help the relays with their work.

Based on these four independent variables, the following three hypotheses will be tested:

Hypothesis 1: *The work of Europe Direct information relays will be dependent on factors detached from the Commission's wishes and guidelines.*

This aims at investigating the role of the host structure in connection with the relays' capacity to act. With regards to the independent variables two and three, the second hypothesis was devised.

Hypothesis 2: *The Commission's approach to Europe Direct is too broad to really meet the needs of the Europe Direct information relays in Germany.*

In addition, the balance of the dual function of Europe Direct information relays will be scrutinised as well as the quality of the communication, testing a third and final hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: *The main priority of Europe Direct information relays is to provide information rather than to be a platform of deliberation.*

5.4.2 EXPLANATORY NOTES ON RESEARCH DESIGN

A mixed approach has been chosen, because a limitation to German relays meant that only a fraction of all Europe Direct information relays could be included in this research. Furthermore, it is important to note that the results of this research cannot necessarily be applied to the European approach as a whole, because of the unique federal features of Germany which also interfuse the host structures.

The first funding period finished at the end of 2008, which posed a challenge to the schedule of the research. All 52 relays had to re-apply with some choosing not to continue the project or not being selected for the second funding period despite re-applying. In order to give all 52 relays the opportunity to participate in the survey, a relatively early date had to be picked for publishing the questionnaire

online, as it was vital for the research to gain insights of the valuable knowledge and experience of all 52 relays. Moreover, added-value was anticipated by enquiring into the motivation for choosing to re-apply and not re-applying⁸.

Furthermore, it was planned to present the findings to the representation to the Commission in Munich to allow the Commission to respond. This would have enabled us to give a more balanced view with regards to some of the more problematic aspects touched upon in both the questionnaire and the interviews. Unfortunately, the interviewee of our choice thought it to be inappropriate to offer their views in this context, which we, of course, must respect. Due to the limited time-frame it was decided to refrain from further attempts to get an official statement from the Commission.

6. ANALYSIS

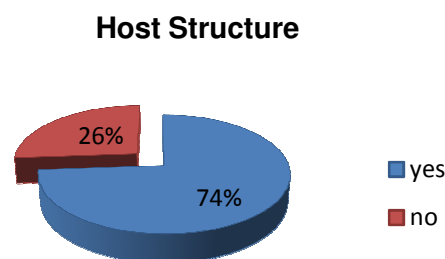
Quantitative and qualitative data was collected from three sources: an online questionnaire; semi-structured interviews, which have been conducted with project leaders of selected Europe Direct relays; as well as descriptive statistical data taken from the Help Desk. In the following, the results will be presented and analysed.

6.1 RESULTS FROM THE ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was made available to the then 52 German Europe Direct information relays. 23 completed questionnaires were submitted which equates to 44.23% of the sample.

6.1.1 HOST STRUCTURE

Asked whether the host structure had an impact on their capacity to act, 73.9% stated 'yes' with only 26.1% opting for 'no'. Participants who had given a positive answer were further asked to explain their views. Although the responses showed that the host structures' impact on their work was not entirely negative, a clear pattern of dependency came to the fore.



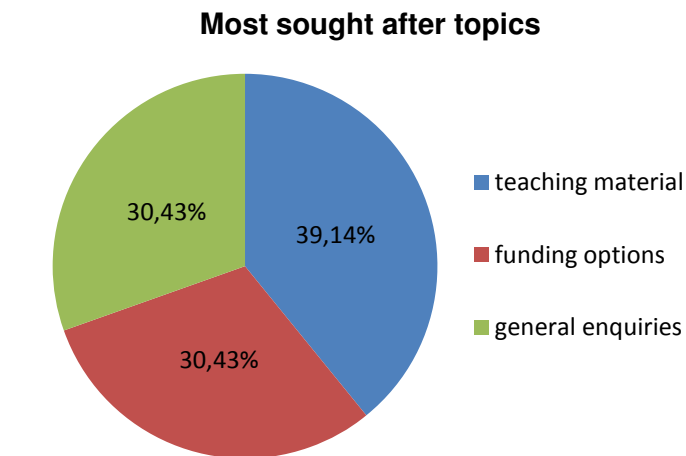
Graph 1: Answers to Q: "Does the host structure have an impact on your capacity to act?"

⁸ Unfortunately, the responses to the questionnaire have shown that all 23 participants have re-applied for the second funding period. Therefore, no differentiation was possible with regards to that aspect.

Five relays stated that the host structure impacted on the relays' capacity to act in financial terms as the relays are incorporated into the general staff and budget policy of the host structure. The subsidy amount of EUR 24,000 puts the relays under financial strain as host structures are only bound by contract to contribute the same amount. Relays are therefore often reliant on further financial means from the host structure.

Five other participants raised concerns with regards to the host structures' impact on the thematic focus of the relay stating that their work is coordinated with, if not adjusted to the host structures' work. A clear difference in thematic focus can indeed be identified: The participants were asked to indicate which topics their clients usually enquired about most. They

could choose between teaching material, information on funding options, and general enquiries by citizens on EU related topics.



Graph 2: Answers to Q: "Which topics do your clients usually enquire about most?"

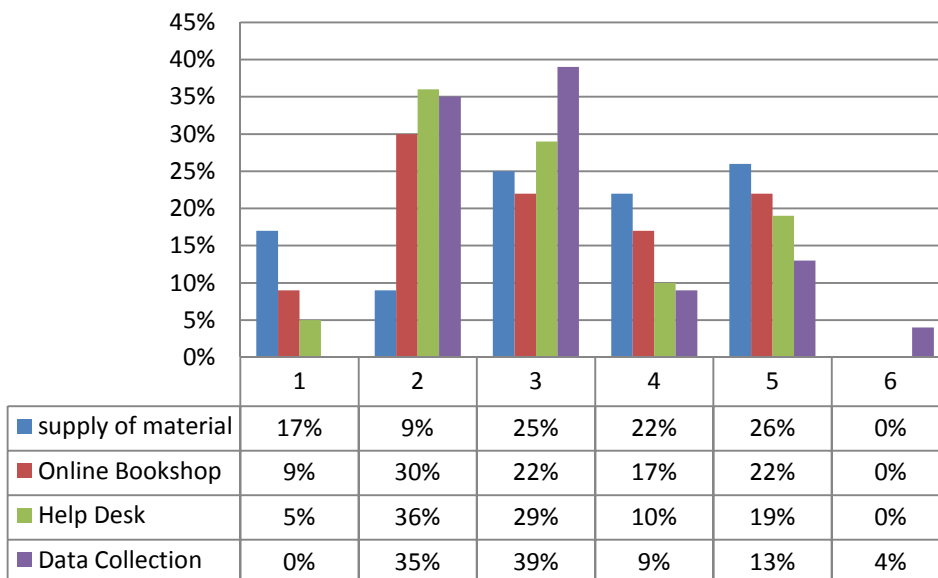
The distribution between those three topics was roughly equal, with 'teaching material' slightly moving into pole position. This result suggests that there is a correlation between the host structure, or the main thematic focus of it, and the type of enquiry lodged most. This assumption is further supported by some of the statements submitted to the question dealing with the host structure's motivation to apply for funding. Asked why their institution wanted to be host to a Europe Direct information relay, the majority stated that it was important to them to transport EU related information into their region. Four participants stated in particular that being part of the Europe Direct network constituted a continuation of already existing commitments of their host structure to EU affairs. Despite a clear commitment to EU topics and the understanding that the EU is important, some participants mentioned still that the participation in this network would improve the host structures' image as well as the general name recognition. Three participants also quoted the financial support for their already existing work and engagement in this field.

The above findings clearly indicate that there is a dependency between the host structure and the relay, both financially and thematically. This allows us to draw the preliminary conclusion that the host structure is one of the factors referred to in hypothesis one which influences the relay’s work irrespective of the Commission’s wishes and guidelines.

6.1.2 SERVICES OFFERED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Four different services were under consideration: The EU online bookshop, the Help Desk, collection of data (e.g. through monthly reports), and the supply of material (both promotional and informational). The participants were asked to rate the services on a scale from 1 to 6, 1 indicating ‘very good’, 6 indicating ‘very bad’. The broad range of opinions indicates mixed feelings for all four chosen services.

Services provided by the European Commission



Graph 3: Answer to Q: “How do you judge the services offered by the European Commission?”

The arithmetic mean ranges from 3.0 (Help Desk) to 3.3 (Supply with Material), with the EU-online bookshop and data collection each reaching an arethmetic mean of 3.1, indicating that the participants were more or less content with the services. Most puzzling, however, is the great discrepancy in perception of those services: The supply with material was graded worst, with more than a quarter (26%) opting to grade it with 5. At the same time, however, 17% were entirely satisfied with this service, opting to grade it with the best mark, 1. The online bookshop and Help Desk only managed to gather 9%, respectively 5%, of top-mark grading. The majority, 52% and 65% respectively, graded these two services with

good or satisfactory. Interestingly, one participant ticked 'I don't know the Help Desk' while 39% thought the way the Commission collected statistical data from the relays was only satisfactory.

The participants were then asked to specify which of the services offered by the Commission they thought of as particularly positive or negative. 18 positive and 19 negative remarks were submitted. The statements most often mentioned are shown below:

	Statement	No. of mentions
Positive +	Training and seminars offered by the Commission to the relays	4x
	Variety and amount of publications made available by the institutions via the online bookshop	4x
	Web-Assistance, Intranet, general support	4x
	Supply with information by the Commission regarding events, news etc.	2x
	Placement of speakers (mainly through Team Europe)	2x
	Regional/national meetings, AGMs	2x
Negative -	Services do not meet the needs of the relays and their clientel, approach too broad and therewith inefficient	7x
	Meeting deadlines, in-time delivery (e.g. of material)	7x
	Bookshop (order quantity too restricted)	6x
	Lack of material for certain target groups (e.g. children, pensioners)	3x
	Monthly Reports (no feedback and flexibility)	2x

It is intriguing that the responses are so varied and at times conflicting. We can only speculate on why this is the case, but the most likely reason is that the relays themselves are as diverse as their answers. They vary considerably in size, structure and experience. Proof for this is the number of enquiries the relays deal with on average every month. The participants were asked to indicate how many enquiries had been processed in the calendar month of September 2008, whereby enquiries can be processed in person, via e-mail or by telephone. The answers to this question diverged considerably, with the lowest number submitted being 16 and the highest number of enquiries being 575. The following chart shows the distribution of enquiries counted in steps of 50, the median overall being 60:

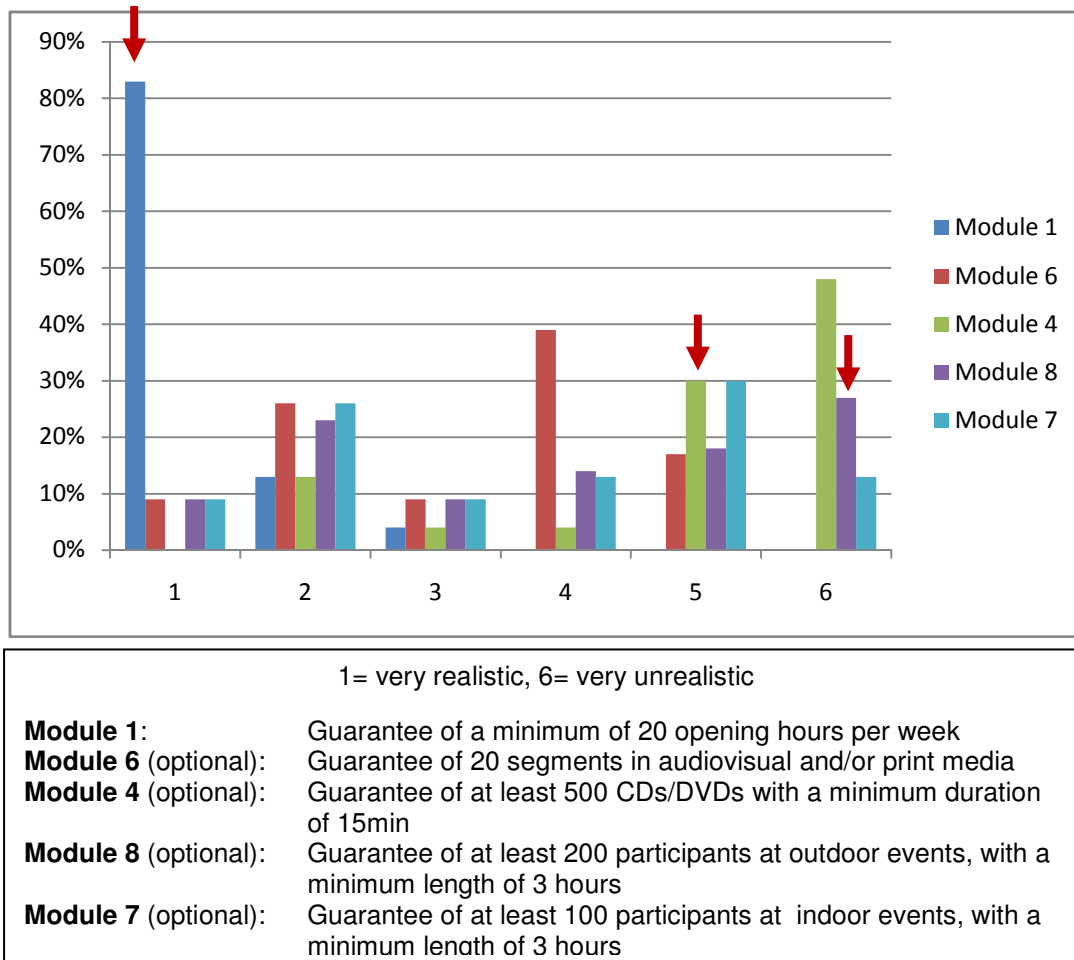
No. of Enquiries	0-50	51-100	101-150	151-200	> 200
No. of mentions	10x	7x	2x	2x	2x

Location is crucial: A relay situated in the city centre is likely to have more personal contacts. The relay in Hamburg, for instance, is situated in the city centre, whereas the relay in Osnabrück is situated on the periphery of the city and is likely to get only small numbers of, or no by-chance visitors at all. This is reflected in the actual number of enquiries, which was stated as roughly 150 for Hamburg and around 30 for Osnabrück. Moreover, some relays have been Carrefours Centres or Information Points, just like Hamburg, a long time before the Europe Direct network was established. The older, more experienced relays can fall back on a higher degree of public awareness. The host structure is also of interest here – the bigger and more established the host structure the higher the degree of awareness and the bigger the cruising radius. Host structure to the relay in Hannover, for instance, is the state chancellery of Lower Saxony ('Staatskanzlei') which has different means at its disposal than a less well-known registered association.

The above findings indicate that the network is a very heterogeneous network, which explains the discrepancies in views over the services provided by the Commission. One third of the participants criticised the Commission's approach regarding the services as too broad and therewith inefficient, which suggests that hypothesis two is correct – namely that the Commission's approach is too broad to really meet the needs of the relays.

6.1.3 COMMISSION’S GUIDELINES FOR FUNDING PERIOD 2009-2012

The impression that the Commission’s approach is too broad is further intensified by the results of the questionnaire section on the guidelines for the new funding period. To blame for this problem is, in the opinion of one participant, “the top-down approach” of the Commission, i.e. a centralised hierarchical approach.



Graph 4: Answers to Q: "How do you judge the new guidelines for the latest funding period?"

Three examples will suffice to demonstrate that opinions again diverge drastically. Module 1, the only compulsory module in this list, is rated by 83% of all 23 participants as very realistic. The lowest mark given for this module is ‘satisfactory’, resulting in an arithmetic mean of 1.2. Optional module 4, on the other hand, got the worst feedback (arithmetic mean: 5), with 48% opting to rate this guideline very unrealistic, and further 30% marking it with ‘poor’ (5). Module 8, with an arithmetic mean of 3.9, however, shows a similar trend compared with some of the service offers. The shares between all six grades are equally divided, with 23% stating that they found this guideline realistic (2) and a similar share (27%) stating the exact opposite, marking it with a 6. In between we find that the rest of the 22

relays which have participated in this particular question have opted for the remaining marks (1=9%, 3=9%, 4=14%, 5=18%).

Overall, we can assume that in particular the smaller relays will struggle to fulfil the guidelines that are, for them, ambitious. One participant argued that because some relays are too small to be able to organise an outdoor event with 300 participants, they would also struggle to realise the big thematic communication priorities.

6.1.4 EVENTS: DO COMMUNICATION PRIORITIES MATTER?

As can be seen below, the criticism expressed by above participant does not prove entirely correct, as the majority of relays listed managed to cover all five main communication priorities for 2007. However, the majority of the 609 submitted events could not be directly grouped under one of the headings as they dealt with general EU information or the promotion of the Europe Direct network. Similarly, the communication priorities are kept rather broad and non-binding, which raises the question of whether these communication priorities are a deciding factor for the relays when planning events.

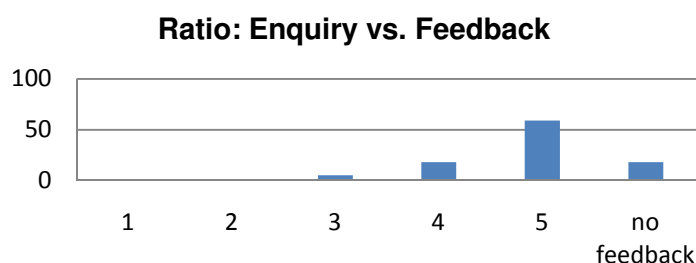
Relay	Communication Priorities for 2007																		
	Prosperity							Solidarity				Security and Freedom		Europe in the World		Future of Europe			
	Education: 20 th Anniversary of ERASMUS	R&D and Innovation	Reassessment of the Single European Market	Reassessment of an Energy Strategy for Europe	Combining flexibility and job safety	Immigration	Better legislation and Simplification	Stock-taking of social reality	Cohesion and rural development (2007-2013)	Environmental Protection	European Year of Equal Opportunities	Preparation for the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008)	Fight against organised crime and terrorism	Control of external borders	Enlargement	Neighbourhood Policy	EU's Market Access Strategy	Plan D und and Constitutional Debate	50th Anniversary of Treaty of Rome
Aachen	x	x				x					x	x			x	x			x
Bayreuth	x														x	x		x	x
Beckum																			
Berlin																			x
Bonn																			x
Darmstadt	x			x															x
Dietze-bach	x	x		x				x	x	x				x	x	x			x
Dresden	x	x		x											x				
Erfurt				x				x		x					x		x		x
Flintbeck				x															
Freiburg																			
Freyung	x		x					x						x					x
Fulda								x											

Furth im Wald														x					x
Görlitz	x				x									x	x			x	x
Hagen	x	x	x		x				x	x	x	x						x	
Hamburg								x			x			x	x	x	x	x	
Ha-nnover			x		x				x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Höxter	x								x										
Karlsruhe														x					
Kiel	x		x		x				x					x	x	x			x
Kleve									x										
Leipzig	x										x								x
Lüneburg	x								x		x	x				x	x		x
Mannheim	x		x											x	x				x
Mildenau	x		x							x					x				x
Miltitz	x								x	x									
Mitwitz									x										
Nürnberg	x	x		x	x				x	x	x								x
Oldenburg		x								x									x
Osnabrück	x										x								
Saarbrücken																			x
Steinfurt										x									x
Stuttgart	x				x			x	x									x	x
Trier																			
Wendgräben	x								x					x	x	x			x
Wolperts- hausen				x						x									x

Table 1: Communication Priorities 2007

6.1.5 FEEDBACK VS. ENQUIRY

Finally, the questionnaire enquired into the relationship between the requests for information and the feedback option. The participants were asked to rate on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating that there has been considerably more feedback than enquiries, and 5 indicating respectively that there has been considerably more enquiries than feedback. There was also the option to tick a box stating that no feedback has ever been given. 22 out of 23 participants completed this question.



Graph 5: Answers to Q: "How do you judge the ratio between enquiry and feedback?"

59% indicated that hardly any feedback has been given (5) by the public towards them or via them to any other EU institution and that enquiries clearly dominated. 18 per cent stated that no-one has ever given feedback. Hence we can conclude that hypothesis three is correct, namely that the relays' main priority is to provide information rather than to be a platform for deliberation. It seems that Europe Direct information relays currently only fulfil one of its two functions sufficiently. Feedback is, of course, a broad term which can mean a great many things. It can refer to someone who lodges a complaint, but also to a group of people debating with a Commissioner on an EU related issue during a panel discussion. The finding that the feedback function is secondary to the informant function is important as the Commission clearly wants to engage with the people as becomes clear in Plan D. Therefore, we have to ask why people do not take advantage of this function as frequently as anticipated by the Commission.

6.1.6 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

The questionnaire has provided us with valuable results with regards to our three independent variables. To conclude the findings of the quantitative research, the following distinctive features with regards to the factors that hinder the relays in fulfilling their mediating function must be highlighted:

1. The **host structures** naturally have a big impact on the relays' capacity to act due to their prominent role. However, this impact seems to be both positive and negative.
2. There is an obvious **discrepancy in perceptions** of the services provided by the Commission with some relays claiming that the Commission's supply does not meet the needs of the relays and – even more worryingly – the demand of the people.
3. The **communication priorities** issued by the Commission do not seem to guide the relays' activities entirely either, which could be the result of said **discrepancy in supply and demand**.
4. Overall, one might suspect that the **Commission's top-down approach** is to blame for the problems encountered by some relays. The **heterogeneous nature of the network** seems to equally contribute to this problem.

6.2 RESULTS FROM THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The semi-structured interviews aimed at further scrutinising the factors mentioned above. As the host structures exert a lot of influence on the relays, the five interview partners were chosen to reflect the different host structures in Germany, as well as to offer a broad perspective on these issues.

6.2.1 HOST STRUCTURE – AN AMBIVALENT RELATIONSHIP

The questionnaire has shown that the host structure affects the relays' capacity to act, both positively and negatively. The interviews confirmed this impression, although a correlation between the type of host structure and the effects, their relationship with the relay has on the relays' work, has emerged.

Generally, all five interviewees agreed that the relay's work would be impossible without the host structures' support – both in financial terms, but also with regards to other resources such as man-power and infrastructure. This situation creates a certain degree of dependency and obligation towards the host structure, as the Europe Direct Info-Point in Hamburg proves: Host structure to this relay is the non-partisan Europa-Union e.V., a registered association and citizens group which advocates a federal Europe. The relay is furthermore supported by the Hamburg Senate and the Chamber of Commerce, which provides working space. Bettina Thöring, dividing her time between working at the info-point and chairing the Hamburg division of Europa-Union, describes the situation as follows:

“We are caught between two stools really, or put differently, it is a situation of mutual give and take. On the one hand, we have to incorporate the Commission's action plan and follow its priorities. On the other hand, we must not forget to also comply with the priorities of the EU department of the Senate as well as ensure that we organise events in cooperation with the chamber of commerce from time to time. Otherwise someone might not be too happy” (Thöring, 17/02/2009).

The non-partisan nature of the host structure, however, is the relay's biggest asset according to Thöring, although this clearly is not the case for all relays: Bianca Mangels, head of the Europe Direct information relay Landkreis Osnabrück (host structure: public administration) states:

“Although we are supposed to work above party lines, I do feel that the political structures of the administration often influence our decisions. Politics is the key to why certain things have to be done, or indeed to why we sometimes are not allowed to do them” (Bianca Mangels, 05/02/2009).

Despite all the red tape, she is still well aware of all the benefits the county administration brings. Like all the other interviewees she is able to use the host structure’s infrastructure and believes that the link to the official administrative level could actually attract attention from the citizens.

Marlis Puls, head of the Europe Direct information relay in Oldenburg, believes that the high degree of continuity that private-law firms can offer is a clear advantage of a host structure subject to private-law over a host-structure subject to public-law or relay with links to public administration. Although it may be too simplistic to generalise this matter, it can, however, be said that host structures subject to public-law often seem to be more limited in their cruising radius, especially when affiliated with administrative or political bodies which are subject to certain rules or restrictions. Public-law bodies are, for instance, subject to electoral law, which prevents administrative institutions, such as the county administration in Osnabrück, from engaging in any form of electoral campaign for six weeks prior to an election. If the relay is supported by such a host structure, it is not allowed to cover the European Parliament elections in June 2009 during the crucial last phase.

Also affected by this rule, despite being a body subject to private-law, is the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. A partisan organisation close to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) it is largely funded with taxpayer’s money. Therefore, the Europe Direct information relay in Dortmund refrains from staging political events prior to the election. Nevertheless, being ideologically close to a particular party does not influence the thematic focus of the relay as Dr. Marco Arndt, head of the educational department of the foundation, explains:

“The foundation really is the perfect partner for us, as it has always had an EU focus. Due to the foundation’s large catchment area we can promote EU related topics in the whole Ruhr area. The host structure does not pose an obstacle to our work with regards to the thematic focus, neither does the foundation’s closeness to the CDU. However, it has happened in the past that MEPs from other parties have avoided to meet us without providing an explanation, which is the only occasion where party closeness is a hindrance” (Dr. Marco Arndt, 06/03/2009).

To sum up, we can confirm that the host structure has an impact on the relays' capacity to act, whereby we can identify differences with regards to the type of host structure. Generally, host structures which are subject to public-law or otherwise have close links to public-law bodies are often most affected, in particular with regards to the thematic focus. However, public-law bodies can give the relays access to sophisticated infrastructure, and often the relays can take advantage of the host structure's reputation and level of public awareness. Overall, there is no such thing as the 'perfect' host structure, as relays subject to private-law bodies are also affected by the host structure.

Asked why their institution had applied to be host structure to a Europe Direct information relay the interviewees all gave similar answers. All five host structures had already been involved with EU-related work on various levels. Offering this service to the public therefore often complemented already existing structures whereby the image of the host structure was thought to be enhanced as well. However, the interviewees agreed that the financial incentive offered by the Commission was definitely not the determining factor. Marlis Puls surely speaks for the majority of the interviewees when she says:

"The funding definitely does not cover all the costs. But for us the intangible value is more important for us. We thoroughly enjoy creating a network with like-minded people from across the EU. We want to exchange ideas with them and generally motivate people to get involved. You cannot think about making a profit when getting involved in Europe Direct" (Marlis Puls, 10/02/2009).

6.2.2 COMMUNICATION PRIORITIES – SENSE OR NONSENSE?

Opinions on the communication priorities issued by the Commission vary among the interviewees. Asked whether those priorities were at all decisive for their decisions on which events to plan, answers ranged from not very decisive to quite decisive. Bianca Mangels, for instance, questions the practicality of some of the priorities:

"Decisive for our decisions on which events we would like to organise is solely the demand of the people. It is therefore difficult to offer events according to the communication priorities if they are of no interest to the citizens. People who just begin to get familiar with the EU and what it entails to be a citizen of the EU, are most interested in basic information on how the EU works, not so much in specialised topics. These communication priorities are simply often a step to far" (Bianca Mangels, 05/02/2009).

Dr. Arndt stated that he got the impression that these priorities are sometimes wishful thinking:

“Some of these communication priorities are devised in the ivory tower without taking into consideration how they could be realised in practice. Some topics really are of no interest to the people” (Dr. Marco Arndt, 06/03/09).

Other relays, however, are convinced that the communication priorities are meaningful and help to structure the relays' activities. In this context, it is very fortunate that the communication priorities are very broad and general – something which has been criticised by some. Indeed, Heinrich Kühnhenrich, Europe Direct project manager in Dortmund, remarks that generally speaking these priorities were so broad that the majority of the relay's work could be subsumed under the communication priorities.

Marlis Puls, even argues that it is absolutely necessary that these priorities are kept so general by the Commission:

“These so-called communication priorities have to be compatible with all 27 member states, after all they are not issued individually for each member state. Furthermore, if they were not priorities, i.e. recommendations, then we could speak of propaganda where we only pass on exactly what we are told by the Commission. Nobody wants that. We should be grateful that these priorities are so general, this way we have a lot more freedom to adapt them to our individual situations” (Marlies Puls, 10/02/2009).

Indeed, the Commission is confronted with a sheer impossible task – namely to simultaneously provide guidance to 27 member states each with different needs and cultural backgrounds. It may seem logical that something like the communication priorities is needed and helpful. In the new funding period the Commission, however, has begun to pay more attention to these priorities, urging the relays to only offer events which are linked to one or more of the priorities. This will cause problems for relays that seek to meet the needs of the people on a more basic level. On the other hand, in order to make them work, priorities have to be kept broad and open, which arguably calls their significance into question.

6.2.3 LACK OF COMMUNICATION OR A CASE OF TOO MUCH INFORMATION?

Another aspect that has emerged in greater detail during the interviews is the aspect of communication in general. Communication is ideally a two-way road, something which is also reflected in the relays' dual function. Altogether, there are three 'channels' that need to be observed when judging communication:

- a) communication between the Commission and the relays
- b) citizens trying to communicate something to the Commission via the relays
- c) Commission's response to this feedback.

Firstly, it was interesting to see that not many people seem to make use of the feedback function. Asked for their opinion on this, the majority of the interviewees suggested that this was nothing unusual. From their experience, people are quick to criticise and complain, but they would often do so without much substance to their complaint. The majority of complaints would not be forwarded to the Commission as too often they seemed ill-informed and prejudiced. Only a minority would be willing to engage in the form of 'debate' that was envisaged by the Commission. This leads some of the interviewees to draw the conclusion that 'Plan D' in its final steps is too elitist, as the topic is too complex and sophisticated. People are required to first get acquainted with the matter properly before they could contribute something meaningful. Therefore, the relays do not think that the feedback function is currently as important. They generally see the provision of information as their main function.

There is some doubt, however, as to whether the feedback forwarded is actually taken notice of, although this view is not shared by everyone. Marlis Puls even argues that 'feedback' is far too broad a term to be able to doubt its success:

"Everybody envisages something different when referring to feedback. When we organise an event with a member of the Commission discussing climate change and the EU's policy on energy with 200 attendants, then I would say this person takes a lot of feedback back to Brussels. Furthermore, we sometimes write reports on green books or white papers, and often we see that our ideas have found their way into new directives – of course not literally, but for us this is a sign that the Commission does pay attention to what goes on in the regional and local level" (Marlis Puls, 10/02/2009).

All interviewees agree, however, that there is a fundamental communication problem between the Commission in Brussels and the local level, although the degree of critique varies. It is often not a question of too little information, on the contrary. On a daily basis the relays are 'flooded' with information in the form of brochures, leaflets and e-mail newsletters. Often, the newsletters are written in such bureaucratic language or Euro-Speak that the relays first have to extract or 'translate' the relevant information for the citizens. Some relays feel left alone by the Commission at times and there appears to be a huge discrepancy between what the Commission wants the relays to do, on the one hand, and what the relays actually can do, on the other.

6.2.4 NETWORK HETEROGENEITY VS. TOP-DOWN APPROACH

Drawing on the results from both the questionnaire and the interviews, Europe Direct is a very heterogeneous network. The relays featured in this interview series are all distinctly different, first and foremost in host structure, but also in size and location. This in itself is nothing unusual but to some extent it explains the obvious discrepancy in answers given as response to the questionnaire. Every relay has different expectations and needs and ultimately has different experiences based on those, which explains the results presented above. It is noteworthy, however, that opposite this heterogeneous network we find the very centralistic and hierarchical top-down approach by the European Commission. A lot of the criticism put forward by the relays with regards to the supply and demand side of the network and the communication, including the communication priorities, can be traced back to the Commission's top-down approach.

The comparison that springs to mind with regards to the Commission's approach is a centrally planned economy. This comparison does not mean to discredit the Commission and its approach to this network in any way, on the contrary. It is simply a realistic depiction of the current situation and it is possible that this approach is the only suitable approach for the EU. One might even argue that the sheer size of the Union requires a central control centre where all the threads converge. Although it would surely be desirable to apply a bottom-up approach, as desired by many relays, the question remains whether such an approach would be feasible.

Certain aspects of the network have already been de-centralised, as some responsibilities have been passed on to the different representations to the Commission. Continuity is one prerequisite for a bottom-up approach, which according to Marlis Puls is not always given:

“The rotation-principle of the European Commission is a clear obstacle to continuity. Every three years someone else is responsible. Due to the host structure, changes also often occur within the relays. Moreover, the relatively short length of four years for the funding period also endangers continuity. Personally, I would prefer a period of 6 to 7 years, although such an arrangement would make it more difficult to change disagreeable things” (Marlis Puls, 10/02/2009).

Who is wrong and who is right in this ‘dispute’? The answer is quite likely ‘no-one’. Of course, one is right in claiming that what the Commission supplies does not always meet the needs of the citizens: superfluous informational and promotional material, as well as a lack thereof in other cases are a daily occurrence. However, one could also argue that the Commission’s supply cannot possibly meet the needs of all the people, because the Commission does not react on demand – it simply generates supply which is then to be used by the relays, irrespective of demand. With 27 member states the EU is so large and diverse that it is logistically impossible to equally meet the needs of all people living between the North Cape and Portugal, and between Ireland and Romania.

In a way, this top-down approach explains a lot of the problems encountered by the relays: The communication priorities must be broad and general, because they are not generated individually for all member states. Information-overload also is symptomatic of this approach, as the Commission supplies the same information to all 27 member states. From this perspective it might even be understandable that the Commission is unable to respond to every feedback or request.

However, this may not be a sufficient enough excuse for the relays which have to try and meet the Commission’s expectations as well as the claims of the host structure and, of course, those of the people. They are left to make up for this discrepancy with creativity and enormous amounts of enthusiasm. The relays refuse to be brought down by the problems. Asked whether their job would equal the proverbial drop in the ocean, no-one really objected, but optimism nevertheless prevailed, according to the principle: Constant dripping wears away the stone!

7. CONCLUSION

This thesis is based on the assumption that the EU is suffering from a perceived democratic deficit. Detached from the academic debate which surrounds the real democratic deficit, which mainly revolves around the institutional set-up of the EU, the perceived democratic deficit is more subjective, based on people's feelings towards, and perceptions of, the EU. The two fundamental causes of this perceived democratic deficit are a lack of knowledge on EU related issues, as well as a lack of access to deliberation. Hence, adequate means to tackle the perceived democratic deficit would be to improve people's political knowledge and to provide access to or a platform for deliberation. Moreover, studies have shown that the two concepts of 'political knowledge' and 'deliberation' enhance one another. Combining these two functions arguably leads to valuable synergy effects, and a tool incorporating both elements would therefore be even more suitable.

In this context Europe Direct information relays are an interesting phenomenon. The repeatedly discussed 'gap' between the institutions of the EU and the EU citizens prompted officials to reconsider the Commission's approach to communication. A new strategy was developed which saw the Europe Direct network as a key to success. Importantly, the relays combine the two elements identified as being essential in the fight against the perceived democratic deficit: On the one hand, the relays aim at increasing people's knowledge about EU-related topics. On the other hand, the network provides a platform for all those citizens that want to join in a dialogue with other EU citizens or with the institutions of the EU. Integrated into the Commission's communication strategy, the network assumes a mediating function, which, incorporating this dual role, in theory makes it an adequate means to fight the perceived democratic deficit.

However, further empirical research has shown that there are a number of factors that have an impact on the relays' capacity to fulfil their mediating function. The most decisive factor is the strong relationship between the relays and their host structures which is characterised by positive and negative dependencies. We could establish that the host structure affects the relays' work both in financial and thematic terms proving correct our first hypothesis: Europe Direct information relays *are* dependent on factors detached from the Commission's guidelines.

With regards to hypothesis two, which claimed that the Commission's approach was too broad in order to really meet the needs of the relays, a number of different issues came to the fore. Generally speaking this hypothesis could be validated based, among other things, on the reception of the Commission's services offered to the relays. Huge discrepancies in the responses revealed that the heterogeneity of the network proves a challenge. This indeed calls the Commission's top-down approach into question. Evidence of this approach are, for instance, the communication priorities, which are kept rather broad and general as they are issued for all 27 member states simultaneously. Some relays have expressed concerns with regards to these priorities as often they would not meet the citizens' needs and therefore were not necessarily the determining factor in the relay's decision to organise events. Equally, the guidelines for the new funding period reveal that the Commission's approach is too general in view of the heterogeneity of the network.

It is important to point out, however, that these difficulties originate in the overall challenge the Commission is facing: Quite possibly the EU has become too big a project to ever be able to overcome this problem. A Union of this size will always struggle to properly serve everyone's needs. You just cannot have everything! It appears that the general assumption which is underlying the Commission's Plan D – namely that people are yearning to be more involved in the decision-making process – is too elitist. Research has shown that EU citizens very rarely take up the opportunity to give feedback to institutions or take part in the kind of deliberative process envisaged by the Commission. Therefore, the relays' role to enhance deliberation is absolutely secondary and not as developed as their role of enhancing people's political knowledge. The relays themselves have stated that they see their main task as providing information to the citizens of Europe, thereby proving our third hypothesis correct.

Key to the described set of problems clearly seems to be the Commission's expectations towards the relays. Our findings generally reaffirm that the Europe Direct network, in theory, is an adequate means to fight the perceived democratic deficit. However, factors such as the relays' dependency on a host structure as well as the juxtaposition of the heterogeneity of the network and the Commission's inevitable top-down approach, show that in practice the relays cannot realise their potential. The relays already tap their full potential within the limits of the operational means they have at their disposal. Evidently, the Commission is heavily reliant on the enthusiasm and idealism of the people who work for the relays. Yet, the relays

only reach a fraction of the EU's population. Therefore, Margot Wallström is mistaken when she claims that the network is a key to the success of Plan D. It simply cannot be due to the economic constraints, lack of adequate target-oriented material, as well as an approach which is not tailored to the differing needs of the relays. It appears that the Commission is taking advantage of the host structures that hope to enhance their public profile by offering such an EU information service. It seems reasonable to assume that the Europe Direct network only serves as a fig-leave for EU officials who have only become too aware of the widening gap between Brussels and the citizens of the EU.

Although certainly difficult to realise, the implementation of an approach which is more tailored to the needs of the relays might be advisable. Alternatively, a bottom-up approach could be initiated to allow the relays to incorporate their valuable ideas and experiences more. The whole Europe Direct project would benefit from that. In that respect, it would also be advantageous to reduce the relays' dependency on the host structure, for instance, by increasing the Commission's share in the financing of the relays, or by providing additional means to the relays where needed. An improvement of the current situation, however, could already be achieved by urging different administrative levels – local, regional, national and EU – to network and cooperate more with each other. Too often the attitude prevails to rely on one's own abilities alone, thereby ignoring the chance to increase efficiency and impact by utilising valuable synergy effects.

It is worth noting that the research concentrated on the relationship between the Commission and the relays only. Other factors with regards to the relationship between the relays and the people are also worth investigating, such as the geographical coverage of the network, to name but one. Finally, irrespective of the network's evident potential, we must come to the conclusion that the relays' efforts can never be more than the proverbial drop in the ocean, unless far-reaching changes to the set up of Europe Direct are implemented.

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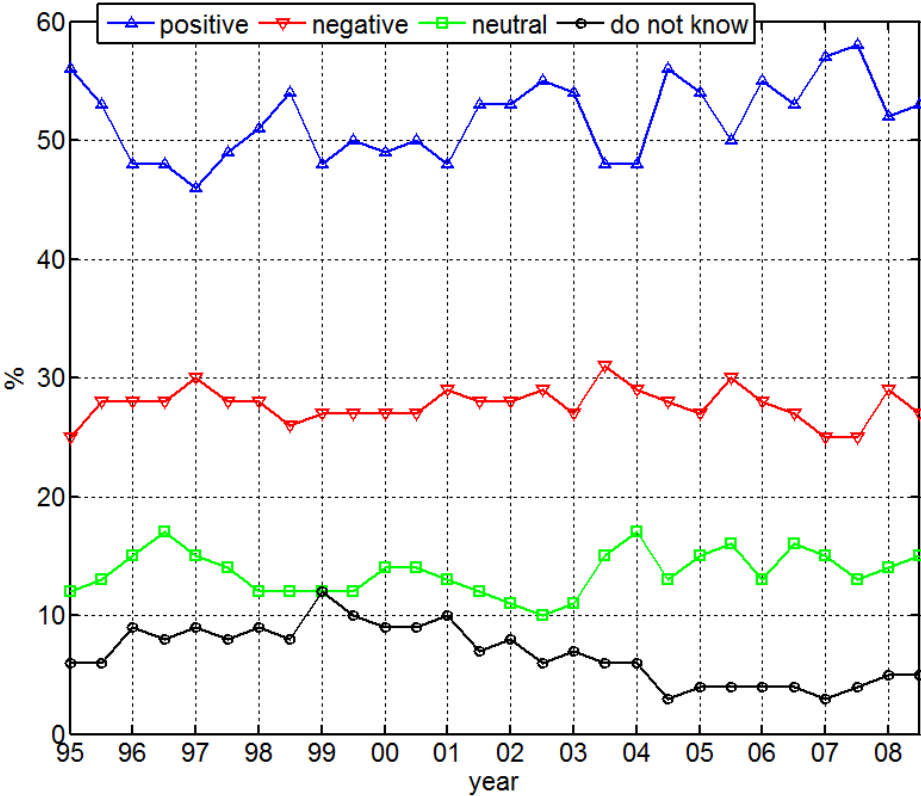
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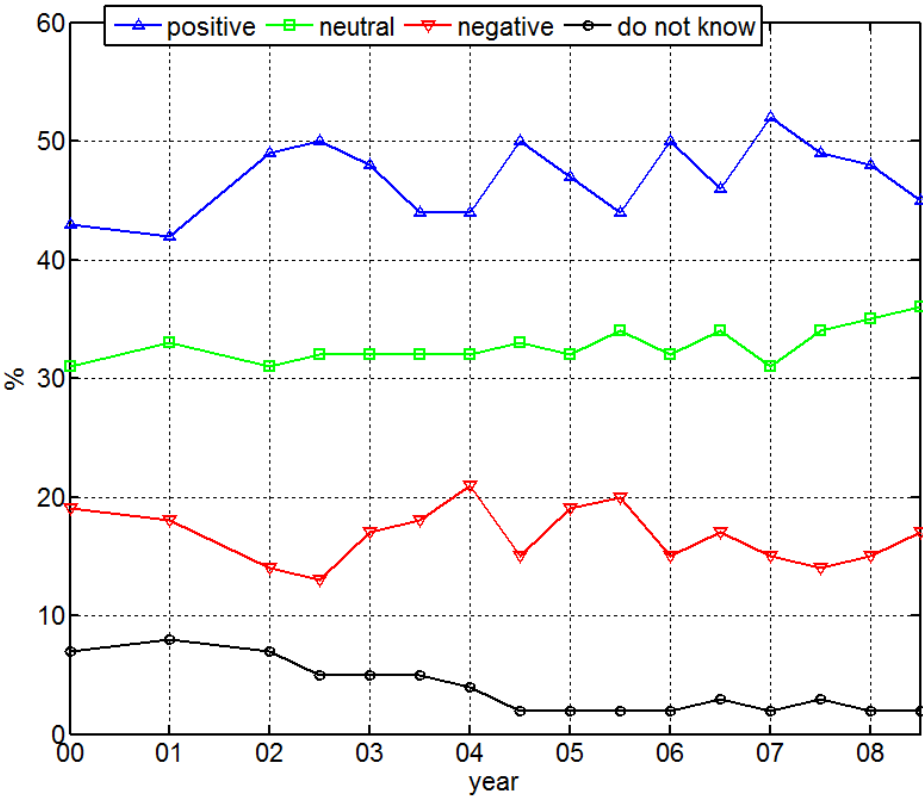
9. APPENDIX

In the appendix you will find all information relevant to the thesis and the preceding research which was too comprehensive or of not immediate interest to be included in the main text.

9.1 EUROBAROMETER: GRAPHS



Graph 6: "Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the European Union is...?" - % EU (own illustration based on Eurobarometer 70, 2008: 31)



Graph 7: Image of the European Union - % EU (own illustration based on Eurobaromter 70, 2008: 47)

9.2 EUROPE DIRECT NETWORK: GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE



Map 2: Europe Direct network coverage, new funding period 2009-2012

9.3 QUESTIONNAIRE: SCREENSHOTS

The participants of the online questionnaire were sent an invitation to the questionnaire via e-mail together with a link to the website as well as a password, which was needed to enter the website.



Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster
IfPol

Stephanie Winter
Umfrage: EUROPE DIRECT 2008

1 2 3 4 5 6

Allgemeine Angaben

Wie viele Bürger-Anfragen (z.B. schriftlich, per E-Mail, telefonisch, persönlich) hat Ihr EUROPE DIRECT Informationsrelais im Monat September 2008 bearbeitet?

Wenn Sie sich an die Thematik der Anfragen erinnern: Welcher Bereich wird hierbei am häufigsten abgedeckt?

- Unterrichtsmaterialien
- Informationen zu Fördermöglichkeiten
- Allgemeine Fragen von Bürgern zu EU-Themen

Durch EUROPE DIRECT hat der Bürger auch die Möglichkeit, den Institutionen der EU Feedback zu geben. Bezogen auf Ihre Kontakte: Wie schätzen Sie das Verhältnis zwischen Feedback-Geben und Informations-Einholung ein?

deutlich mehr Feedback deutlich mehr Informations-Einholung kein Feedback

Welche Trägerstruktur liegt vor?

- privat-rechtlich
- öffentlich-rechtlich

Beeinflusst die Trägerstruktur Ihre Handlungsfähigkeit?

- ja
- nein

Inwiefern beeinflusst die Trägerstruktur Ihres EUROPE DIRECT Informationsrelais Ihre Handlungsfähigkeit?

<< Zurück Weiter >>

1st page of online questionnaire



Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster
IfPol

Stephanie Winter
Umfrage: EUROPE DIRECT 2008

1 2 3 4 5 6

Service der Europäischen Kommission

Wie beurteilen Sie die folgenden Service-Angebote der EU Kommission?

EU-Online-Buukshop	sehr gut	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	sehr schlecht
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Help Desk	sehr gut	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	sehr schlecht	<input type="radio"/> keine Help Desk nicht
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Statistische Erfassung Ihrer Daten im Intranet (Monthly Reports etc.)	sehr gut	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	sehr schlecht
---	----------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	---------------

Versorgung mit Material (z.B. Give-aways, Themenplakate)	sehr gut	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	sehr schlecht
--	----------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	---------------

Bitte erläutern Sie, was Sie an den Service-Angeboten der EU Kommission als besonders positiv empfinden:

Bitte erläutern Sie, was Sie an den Service-Angeboten der EU Kommission als besonders negativ empfinden:

<< Zurück Weiter >>

2nd page of online questionnaire



Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster
IfPol

Stephanie Winter
Umfrage: EUROPE DIRECT 2008

1 2 3 4 5 6

Partnerschaft zwischen EU Kommission und EUROPE DIRECT Informationsrelais

Die EU Kommission wünscht sich die EUROPE DIRECT Informationsrelais als "zuverlässige Partner" bei der Durchführung von Initiativen, Kampagnen und Aktionen. Rückblickend auf die letzte Förderperiode, würden Sie der folgenden Aussage zustimmen:

"Die EU Kommission bezieht die EUROPE DIRECT Informationsrelais bei der Durchführung von Initiativen, Kampagnen und Aktionen der EU Kommission immer mit ein."

- Stimme zu
- Stimme nicht zu

Bitte begründen Sie Ihre Antwort (Sie können auch gerne Beispiele nennen):

--

Finden Sie, dass das Netzwerk EUROPE DIRECT in Deutschland von der EU Kommission ausreichend beworben wird?

- ja
- nein

<< Zurück Weiter >>

3rd page of online questionnaire



Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster
IfPol

Stephanie Winter
Umfrage: EUROPE DIRECT 2008

1 2 3 4 5 6

EUROPE *DIRECT* Ausschreibung

Seit wann ist Ihre Institution Trägerin eines EUROPE *DIRECT* Informationsrelais?

Warum hat sich Ihre Institution darum beworben, Trägerin eines EUROPE *DIRECT* Informationsrelais zu werden?

Haben Sie sich bei der Neuausschreibung der EU Kommission für den Zeitraum 2009-2012 erneut beteiligt?

- ja
- nein

Bitte begründen Sie Ihre Entscheidung:

<< Zurück Weiter >>

4th page of online questionnaire



Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster
IffoI

Stephanie Winter
Umfrage: EUROPE DIRECT 2008

1 2 3 4 5 6

Vorgaben der EU Kommission für die Module (Förderperiode 2009-2012)

Bitte schauen Sie sich die folgenden Fragen auch an, wenn Sie nicht an der aktuellen Ausschreibung für die Förderperiode 2009-2012 teilgenommen haben!

Für die neue Förderperiode 2009-2012 gibt es zum ersten Mal ganz klare Vorgaben für die einzelnen - zum Teil optionalen - Module. Nur so und nicht anders konnten die Module bei der Bewerbung angegeben werden.

Wenn Sie auf Ihre Erfahrungen der letzten Jahre zurückblicken, wie beurteilen Sie die festen Modulvorgaben der EU Kommission in der aktuellen Ausschreibung?

Modul 1: Gewährleistung einer Mindestöffnungszeit Ihrer Einrichtung von 20 Stunden pro Woche		
sehr realistisch	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	sehr unrealistisch

Modul 6 (optional): Gewährleistung von mindestens 20 Beiträgen in audiovisuellen Medien oder Printmedien		
sehr realistisch	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	sehr unrealistisch

Modul 4 (optional): Produktion von mindestens 500 CDs/DVDs mit einer Mindestlaufzeit von 15 min		
sehr realistisch	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	sehr unrealistisch

Modul 8 (optional): Gewährleistung einer Mindestteilnehmerzahl von 200 sowie einer Mindesdauer von 3 Stunden bei Außenveranstaltungen		
sehr realistisch	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	sehr unrealistisch

Modul 7 (optional): Gewährleistung von einer Mindestteilnehmerzahl von 100 sowie eine Mindesdauer von 3 Stunden bei Veranstaltungen in geschlossenen Räumen		
sehr realistisch	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	sehr unrealistisch

<< Zurück Weiter >>

5th page of online questionnaire



Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster
IfPol

Stephanie Winter
Umfrage: EUROPE DIRECT 2008

1 2 3 4 5 6

Verbesserungsvorschläge

Damit sind Sie auch schon fast am Ende meines Fragebogens angelangt. Vielen Dank für Ihr Engagement! - Bitte beantworten Sie mir abschließend noch folgende Frage:

Was sollte Ihrer Meinung nach am dem Projekt "EUROPE DIRECT Informationsrelais" verbessert werden?

--	--

VIELEN DANK!

Damit ich die Daten auch werten kann, klicken Sie bitte unbedingt auf den Button 'ABSENDEN'.

Wenn Sie Fragen zu den Ergebnissen haben, können Sie sich gerne unter Stephanie.Winter@uni-muenster.de bei mir melden.

<< Zurück Absenden

6th page of online questionnaire

9.4 QUESTIONNAIRE: ENGLISH TRANSLATION

1. General Aspects

1.1 How many enquiries (e.g. in writing, via e-mail or telephone) did your Europe Direct information relay process in the calendar month of September 2008?

1.2 Which areas do enquiries usually cover most:

- a) teaching material
- b) Information on EU funding
- c) general enquiries on EU related issues

1.3 Via Europe Direct EU citizens have the opportunity to give feedback to the institutions of the European Union. Based on your contacts, how do you judge the relationship between the requests for information and giving feedback?

considerably more requests for information considerably more feedback

no feedback

1.4 Which host structure exists? private-law body public-law body

1.5 Does the host structure influence your capacity to act? yes no

1.6 How does the host structure impact on your capacity to act?

2. Services provided by the European Commission

How do you judge the following service offers of the Commission:

2.1 EU online bookshop: very good very bad

2.2 Help Desk: very good very bad

2.3 Collection of Statistical Data (e.g. monthly reports):

very good very bad

2.4 Supply of material (e.g. give-aways): very good very bad

2.5 Please elaborate on which of the Commission's service offers you find particularly positive.

2.6 Please elaborate on which of the Commission's service offers you find particularly negative.

3. Partnership between the European Commission and the Europe Direct information relays

3.1 The Commission wants the relays to be a "reliable partner" for the realisation of campaigns, events and other activities. Looking back on the previous funding period, would you agree with the following statement:

"The EU Commission includes Europe Direct information relays in the realisation of the Commission's initiatives, campaigns and other actions"

agree disagree

3.2 Please motivate your decision.

3.3 Do you think that the Europe Direct network in Germany is advertised enough by the European Commission?

4. Europe Direct tender

- 4.1 Since when is your institution a host structure to a Europe Direct information relay?
- 4.2 Why has your institution applied to be a host structure to a Europe Direct information relay?
- 4.3 Did you participate in the Commission's tender for the new funding period 2009-2012?
- yes no
- 4.4 Please elaborate on you decision.

5. The Commission's guidelines for modules (funding period 2009-2012)

Please look at the following questions even if you have not re-applied for the next funding period 2009-2012!

For the new funding period 2009-2012, the Commission has provided the relays with guidelines for the modules, which are both compulsory and optional, for the first time.

Looking back on your experiences from the last years, how do you judge the Commission's concrete modules for the new funding period?

- 5.1 Module 1: Guarantee of a minimum of 20 opening hours per week
Very realistic very unrealistic
- 5.2 Module 6 (optional): Guarantee of 20 segments in audiovisual and/or print media
Very realistic very unrealistic
- 5.3 Module 4 (optional): Guarantee of at least 500 CDs/DVDs with a minimum duration of 15 min
Very realistic very unrealistic
- 5.4 Module 8 (optional): Guarantee of at least 200 participants at outdoor events, with a minimum length of 3 hours
Very realistic very unrealistic
- 5.5 Module 7 (optional): Guarantee of at least 100 participants at indoor events, with a minimum length of 3 hours
Very realistic very unrealistic

6. Suggestions for improvements

You have almost reached the end of my questionnaire. Thank you very much for your commitment! – Please answer the following last question:

- 6.1 In your opinion, what should be improved in the Europe Direct relay project?

Thank you very much!

In order to be able to evaluate your answers, please click the button 'SEND'.

If you have any questions regarding the results, please don't hesitate to get in touch.
My e-mail address is: Stephanie.Winter@uni-muenster.de

9.5 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS: EUROPE DIRECT RELAYS (GERMAN)

1. Europe Direct Informationsrelais haben die Funktion, zwischen den Institutionen der EU (insbesondere der Kommission) und den Bürgern zu vermitteln. Die EU hat damit ihren Kommunikationsansatz auf die lokale und regional Ebene herunter gebrochen. Die Relais fungieren dabei als eine Art Filter für die Informationen, die die Kommission gerne an die Bürger vermittelt sehen möchte.
 - a. Können Sie bitte kurz umreißen, worin Sie die Hauptaufgabe Ihres Europe Direct Informationsrelais sehen?
 - b. Warum können Sie diese Arbeit besser machen, als die Kommission?
 - c. Gibt es Faktoren, die Sie in Ihrer Tätigkeit behindern?
2. Jedes Jahr organisieren die Europe Direct Informationsrelais Veranstaltungen – auch in Zusammenarbeit mit anderen Partnern. Von der Europäischen Kommission gibt es dazu keine konkreten Vorgaben, lediglich die doch eher sehr allgemein gefassten Kommunikationsprioritäten.
 - a. Nach welchen Kriterien entscheiden Sie sich, welche Veranstaltungen Sie planen und durchführen wollen?
 - b. Stehen die Kommunikationsprioritäten dabei im Vordergrund, oder sind andere Überlegungen ausschlaggebend?
3. Als Europe Direct Informationsrelais sind Sie auf Ihren Träger angewiesen, der bei der Ausschreibung für das Europe Direct Netzwerk die finanziellen Mittel für Ihre Arbeit beantragt hat. 74% all derer, die an meiner Online-Umfrage teilgenommen haben, haben angegeben, dass die Trägerstruktur ihre Handlungsfähigkeit beeinflusst.
 - a. In welcher Weise beeinflusst die Trägerstruktur Ihre Arbeit?
 - b. Würde es Ihre Arbeit erleichtern, wenn Sie nicht auf den Träger angewiesen wären?
 - c. Wie würde sich Ihre Arbeit in diesem Fall von der jetzigen Situation unterscheiden?
 - d. Welche Gründe waren Ihrer Meinung nach für Ihren Träger ausschlaggebend für eine Bewerbung um die Trägerschaft eines Europe Direct Informationsrelais?

4. Europe Direct Informationsrelais haben zwei wichtige Aufgaben: Zum einen stellen sie den Leuten Informationen zur Verfügung, geben Rat und beantworten Fragen zu EU-Themen. Auf der anderen Seite, sind sie aber auch eine Plattform, die es den Bürgern der EU ermöglicht, mit den Institutionen in den Dialog zu treten. Die Bürger können ihre Meinungen und Erfahrungen einbringen, die dann über das Europe Direct Büro zurück an die Kommission geleitet werden. Die Online-Umfrage hat jedoch ergeben, dass in mehr als 60% aller Fälle, die Informationseinholung deutlich überwiegt. 18% der Teilnehmer der im letzten Jahr durchgeführten Online-Umfrage haben sogar angegeben, dass noch nie jemand von dieser Feedback-Möglichkeit Gebrauch gemacht hat.
 - a. Woran mag es Ihrer Einschätzung nach liegen, dass die Leute von dieser Möglichkeit keinen Gebrauch machen?
 - b. Ist die Annahme der Kommission, dass sich die Bürger von sich aus an die Institutionen wenden, womöglich zu elitär?

5. In der Umfrage habe ich auch um eine Einschätzung der Service-Angebote gebeten. Es handelte sich dabei um den Online-Bookshop, den Help Desk, die statistische Erfassung Ihrer Daten, sowie die Versorgung mit Materialien. Überraschenderweise fiel das Ergebnis sehr durchwachsen aus. Es gab Relais, die diese Service-Angebote mit ‚gut‘, ja sogar ‚sehr gut‘ bewertet haben. Auf der anderen Seite, hat eine ähnlich große Gruppe die Service-Angebote der Kommission mit ‚unbefriedigend‘ und ‚ungenügend‘ bewertet.
 - a. Wie erklären Sie sich diese Diskrepanz?
 - b. Wie beurteilen Sie in diesem Zusammenhang, den top-down Ansatz der EU Kommission (also die zentralisierte, hierarchische Organisation)?
 - c. Welche Vor- und Nachteile sehen Sie in diesem Ansatz, vor allem wenn Sie Ihre eigene Arbeit zum Maßstab nehmen?

6. Kommunikation spielt in jeder Beziehung eine wichtige Rolle. Die Feedback-Funktion der Relais wurde bereits angesprochen. In gleicher Weise sollte es Aufgabe der Kommission sein, die Relais über Projekte und Kampagnen zu informieren – wenn nicht sogar mit einzubeziehen – sowie Nachrichten und Neuerungen zu verbreiten. Einige Relais beschwerten sich allerdings über einen Mangel an Information und Kooperation von Seiten der Kommission.
 - a. Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit der Kommunikation zwischen der Kommission und Ihrem Relais?
 - b. Wie reagiert die Kommission auf Probleme oder von Bürgern angebrachte Anregungen?

7. 65% aller Teilnehmer an meiner Online-Umfrage haben angegeben, dass sie der Meinung sind, dass die Europäische Kommission das Netzwerk nicht ausreichend bewirbt. Diese Einschätzung scheint durch die Angaben des Eurobarometer bestätigt zu werden. Fernsehen, Printmedien und das Internet sind nach wie vor die Hauptinformationsquellen für EU-interessierten Bürger. Das Europe Direct Netzwerk wird unter der Option Telefon, Informationsdienste u.Ä. geführt. Allerdings gab nur 1% aller Befragten an, Informationen darüber zu beziehen.
 - a. Wo liegt Ihrer Meinung nach die Verantwortlichkeit für ein solches Ergebnis?
 - b. Was sollte Ihrer Meinung nach getan werden, damit sich das ändert?

8. Die neueste Ausgabe des Eurobarometer hat auch gezeigt, dass das Image der EU unter den EU-Bürgern wieder weniger positiv wahrgenommen wird. Lediglich 43% aller EU-Bürger geben an, ein positives Image der EU zu haben. In Deutschland sind es immerhin 48%. Zudem haben 56% das Gefühl, nicht ausreichend über EU-Themen informiert zu sein. 22% geben sogar zu, überhaupt nichts über die EU zu wissen.
 - a. Haben Sie beim Anblick solcher Zahlen nicht manchmal das Gefühl, Ihre Arbeit sei nur ein Tropfen auf den heißen Stein?

9.6 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS: EUROPE DIRECT RELAYS (ENGLISH)

- 1) It is the Europe Direct information relays' task to mediate between the institutions of the European Union (in particular the European Commission) and the citizens. Thus, the Commission has broken down its communication approach to the local and regional level. The relays are a 'filter' for all the information that the Commission would like to communicate to the people.
 - a) Could you please briefly outline what the main task of your Europe Direct information relay is?
 - b) Why can you do this job better than the Commission?
 - c) Are there any factors that are an obstacle to your work?

- 2) Every year Europe Direct information relays organize events – often in cooperation with other partners. There are no concrete guidelines for that from the Commission, just rather general communication priorities.
 - a) According to which criteria do you decide which events you would like to plan?
 - b) Are communication priorities or other considerations decisive?

- 3) Europe Direct information relays are dependent on their host structure which has applied for the relays' funding. 74% of all participants of my online questionnaire have stated that the host structure impacts on the relay's capacity to act.
 - a) How does the host structure impact on your capacity to act?
 - b) Would it make your situation any easier if you were not dependent on a host structure?
 - c) Would your work differ in any way if you were not dependent on a host structure?
 - d) What made your host structure apply to be a host structure to a Europe Direct information relay?

- 4) Europe Direct information relays have two important tasks: On the one hand, they provide people with information, they give advice, answer questions on EU-topics. On the other hand, they also are a platform that enables people to enter a dialogue with the institutions of the EU. People can introduce their opinions and experiences, that are then forwarded to the institutions by the relay. In 60% of all cases, according to the online survey, the requests for information drastically prevailed. 18% of all participants even stated that no-one has ever used the feedback function.
 - a) In your view, why do people not use this feedback function?
 - b) Is the assumption of the European Commission that all people address the institutions of their own accord too elitist?

- 5) In the online survey I have also asked for an evaluation of the Commission's service offers (online bookshop, help desk, data collection, supply of material). Surprisingly, the results reflect mixed feelings: Some relays marked the services with 'good' and 'very good'. Other relays marked the services with 'satisfactory' and 'insufficient'.
 - a) How do you explain this discrepancy?
 - b) How do you judge the 'top-down approach' of the European Commission in this context?
 - c) Which advantages and disadvantages do you see, in particular if you take your own work into consideration?

- 6) Communication is important in any relationship. We have already addressed the feedback function of the relays. On the other hand, the Commission should also keep the relays informed, if not even integrate them in the Commission's endeavours. Some relays have complained about a lack of information and cooperation on part of the Commission.
 - a) How content are you with the communication between the Commission and your relay?
 - b) How does the Commission react when you forward people's feedback?

- 7) 65% of all participants of the online survey have stated that they are of the opinion that the Commission does not advertise the network enough. This assessment is affirmed by the Eurobarometer. TV, print media and the internet are the main sources of information for citizens interested in EU-topics. The Europe Direct network is listed under the option telephone, information services etc.. But only 1% of all respondents said it would receive information through those.
- a) Who is responsible for such a result in your opinion?
 - b) In your opinion, what should be done to change that?
- 8) The latest Eurobarometer issue showed that the people's image of the EU is again less positive. Only 43% of EU citizens stated to have a positive image of the EU. In Germany, at least 48% said they had a positive image. Moreover, 56% had the feeling to be not sufficiently informed about EU-related issues. 22% even admitted to know nothing about the EU.
- a) In view of such figures do you sometimes feel that your work is the proverbial drop in the ocean?