



Flemish Deaf Parliament

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A platform for participatory citizenship

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Flemish Deaf Parliament

- Platform of deliberative democracy developed in 2014 through cooperation between Ghent University and Doof Vlaanderen.
- Flemish Deaf Parliament aims to provide opportunities for deaf community members to actively participate in addressing concerns about the future.



Flemish Deaf Parliament: Flemish Deaf People Speak Out!

<https://vimeo.com/14202278/review/133591569/0ac59ac4da>



Deliberative democracy democracy

Sources of inspiration

- Research experiments of deliberative democracy (Fiskin, 1990s)
 - citizens with different perspectives are able to develop practical proposals
- International initiatives of deliberative democracy and participatory citizenship: Iceland (2010-2012), Ireland (2013)
- International initiatives of deliberative democracy and participatory citizenship in Flanders and Belgium
 - G-1000 (2011): citizens in a politically divided context such as Belgium are able to make informed decisions
 - ‘Citizen budgets’ in local governance and Flemish cities

Ostbelgian Model: Permanent citizen council



- The German-speaking Community of Belgium
- 77,000 citizens
- 2019: Parliament of German-Speaking Community voted a decree in support of a permanent citizen council of 24 citizens
- First region in the world with a permanent citizen dialogue in addition to parliament
- Inspired by G-1000



Collective decision-making in deaf/sign language communities



Flemish Deaf Parliament



Meetings at 7 local deaf clubs

Flemish Deaf Parliament



- Deaf Awareness Day 2013: launch of the video
- January – April 2014: over 350 signers gathered at local deaf clubs
- Topics discussed: education, employment, deaf elders, deaf heritage
- Documentary presenting core themes of regional meetings

Debating futures in Flemish Deaf Parliament

<https://vimeo.com/129340738>

A participant's perspective

“I am watching a lot of political television programmes; deaf people should also be politically active so that they learn how they can give their opinion. ...

Deaf people feel appreciated when they have an opportunity to have a say about employment, elderly deaf people, and discrimination. This enables them to develop self-confidence and feel equal to hearing people.”

(Ronald Van Campenhout in *Dovennieuws*, 2014, p. 4; translation by GDC)

Findings

- A platform for learning and reflection of deaf citizens in the face of transitions, with opportunities for listening, putting forth opinions, considering different views, add to the debate.
- A platform for learning to deal with differences between people and develop empathic and dialogical capacities.
- **Participatory platforms for deaf citizens are valuable for political and democratic practice**

A participant's perspective

“I had looked forward to the first assembly of Flemish Deaf Parliament and was very curious. Actually, I had thought that the debate would develop in a negative way, but... we really did listen to each other's opinions on social affairs, media, education, employment, public transport, etc. ... It is just a pity there was not enough time for all subjects to be covered...

It would a good idea if Flemish Deaf Parliament would gather often in the future and that, for example, workshops would be organized to deepen some topics.”

(Alain Wuytjens, in *Dovennieuws*, 2014, p. 4; translation by GDC)

Further information?

De Clerck, G. A. M. (2017). Debating futures in Flemish deaf parliament. Deaf epistemologies, participatory citizenship, and sustainable development. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 162(4), 350-359. Doi: 10.1353/aad.2017.0032

De Clerck, G. (2016). Debating futures in Flemish deaf parliament. Deaf epistemologies, participatory citizenship, and sustainable development. In: G. De Clerck & Peter V. Paul (Eds.). *Sign Language, sustainable development, and equal opportunities* (pp. 49-74). Washington, DC, USA: Gallaudet University Press.

Documentary and trailer:

<https://www.signlanguageprojects.com/en/flemish-deaf-parliament>