



FIRST REDIRECT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

BRUSSELS,
9-10 NOVEMBER 2023

CONSORTIUM MEETING

Report drafted by
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SUMMARY



This report presents the outcomes of the REDIRECT General Assembly held in Brussels on 9-10 November 2023 and hosted at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). The meeting brought together the consortium to review the state of play of the project, assess progress across work packages, and align the theoretical, empirical, ethical and managerial dimensions of the research agenda.

The Assembly marked an important transition in the life of the project. After the first months of work, REDIRECT had moved beyond the launch phase and entered a more operational stage. Partners were asked not only to report on submitted and forthcoming deliverables, but also to identify points of dependence among work packages, clarify open practical questions, and anticipate the decisions needed for the first reporting period and for the activities planned in 2024.

Across the two days, discussions focused on the conceptual foundations of the representative disconnect, the development of shared empirical infrastructures, data management and ethics, experiments on responsiveness, governance and rescaling, youth and representation, strategies of democratic reconnection, dissemination, and internal coordination. The meeting also included a hybrid session with the broader REDIRECT community and members of the Scientific Advisory Board, centred on Alfio Mastropaolo's presentation on representation and the invention of modern politics.

Overall, the Brussels General Assembly helped consolidate a shared understanding of the project's direction. It created a common roadmap for translating the initial theoretical and organisational work of REDIRECT into coordinated empirical research, dissemination activities, and practical instruments for consortium management.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

REDIRECT studies the representative disconnect as a multi-dimensional problem affecting citizens, parties, parliaments, institutions and the broader ecology of democratic representation. In this perspective, the Brussels General Assembly was not simply an administrative meeting. It was a moment for testing whether the different strands of the project were developing in a coherent and mutually reinforcing way.

The consortium had to connect several forms of work: conceptual reconstruction, survey design, qualitative fieldwork, experimental research, data management, dissemination and stakeholder engagement. The General Assembly therefore served as a collective checkpoint. It allowed partners to make explicit what had already been achieved, what remained uncertain, and where closer coordination was required.

Main objectives

The meeting aimed to consolidate the common framework of the project; review progress on submitted and forthcoming deliverables; clarify dependencies among work packages; discuss data-sharing, ethical approval and publication rules; prepare mass and elite survey work; involve the Scientific Advisory Board; and improve day-to-day cooperation within the consortium.

A further objective concerned dissemination and project visibility. The discussion made clear that REDIRECT would need common templates, shared communication practices, and more efficient tools for circulating working documents, presentation materials and decisions among partners.

FOCUS OF THE MEETING

The Assembly combined scientific discussion, work-package reporting and project management. Its function was to transform the first phase of REDIRECT into a coordinated plan for implementation.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

WP1 and the theoretical core

The discussion confirmed the central role of WP1 in providing the conceptual backbone for the project. Exeter presented three forthcoming deliverables: a state-of-the-art theoretical review on representative democracy, a report on the ecology of representation, and a later report on the forms and dimensions of the representative disconnect. These outputs were described as starting points for the research rather than final conclusions.

The notion of a representative ecology was particularly important because it encouraged partners to analyse representation not only through formal institutions, but also through the relationships among parties, parliaments, citizens, media, organisations and public claims.

Representation and modern politics

Alfio Mastropaolo's hybrid presentation offered a socio-historical entry point into the project's broader concerns. Indeed, in his intervention the scholar located modern representation within the long-term transformation of political conflict, state-building and the institutionalisation of peaceful competition.

The presentation helped connect the historical development of representative government with contemporary concerns about democratic disconnection. It also provided a basis for future REDIRECT forums, interviews and dissemination formats focused on the meaning and transformation of political representation.

KEY OUTCOME

The Brussels discussion framed REDIRECT as a project that links conceptual reconstruction with empirical diagnosis and practical strategies for democratic reconnection.

WORK PACKAGE STATE OF PLAY

The state-of-play discussions showed that the project had already developed a dense and interdependent work structure. WP3, led by Jagiellonian University and the University of Oslo, focused on the intermediation disconnect. Its work centred on political parties, parliaments and mediated democratic politics, with particular attention to vertical disconnect and the role of youth within parliamentary systems.

WP4, led by Oslo and Jagiellonian University, addressed the governance disconnect. The discussion focused on rescaling, the European Union context, the "no demos" thesis, and the role of crises and emergency politics in producing or reinforcing representative disconnection. A key point was the need to align WP4 with WP2, since survey items on governance disconnect would have to be prepared in time for the elite and mass questionnaires.

HUN-REN/TK presented work that connected governance, emergency politics and citizen evaluations of democracy. The team discussed planned research on executive power grabs during the COVID-19 pandemic, trust, satisfaction with democracy and accountability, as well as the design of experimental work on responsiveness.

The Assembly therefore clarified that each work package was advancing a distinct dimension of the project while depending on common concepts, shared data infrastructures and coordinated methodological choices.

DATA, ETHICS AND EMPIRICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

UNISI presented several deliverables and coordination tasks that were central to the operationalisation of the project. The Data Management Plan had already been submitted and was described as a living document that would require updates as data collection progressed. The Brussels discussion clarified the distinction between restricted data, such as interview transcripts, and unrestricted data, such as survey datasets.

Partners also discussed where data should be stored, how access should be granted, and who would be authorised to use different datasets for publications. These questions were not treated as purely technical matters. They were connected to the broader need for trust, transparency and predictability within the consortium.

The meeting also reviewed progress on the Registry of Datasets and Relevant Survey Items. This work aimed to build a continuity guide for studying representative disconnect from the perspective of both citizens and elites. It included mass surveys such as the European Social Survey, Eurobarometer, the European Values Study, the World Values Survey, IntUne, EUENGAGE and EUCOMMEET, alongside elite surveys retrieved from major repositories.

A further strand concerned the Database of Relevant Stakeholders, designed to support dissemination, future events, Delphi exercises and contacts with institutions or organisations relevant to the project. Partners were invited to contribute additional names and entities.

PRACTICAL PRIORITIES

The Assembly identified ethical approvals, data access rules, publication policy and stakeholder mapping as immediate issues requiring collective follow-up.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RECONNECTION

Experiments and responsiveness

Work on responsiveness was discussed as one of the project's key empirical pillars. UNILE and HUN-REN/TK presented activities linked to online experiments and conjoint designs. These studies would examine how citizens react to different forms of representation, including among the others themes such as responsiveness, constituency service, allocation, symbolic action and institutional performance. The discussion highlighted the importance of moving from abstract concerns about democratic dissatisfaction to testable mechanisms connecting representative behaviour, trust, satisfaction and political participation.

Strategies of reconnection

UNILE presented the submitted deliverable on reconnection strategies. The work organised possible remedies around three pillars: empowering citizens, revitalising political parties, and making parliaments more representative and transparent.

Examples discussed included voting advice applications, parliamentary monitoring websites (PMOs), online public engagement, reforms of the candidate selection process, online participation platforms and gender quotas. These strategies would later feed into a Delphi exercise and into the development of policy recommendations.

YOUTH, AFFECTIVE DISCONNECT AND FIELDWORK

WP8, led by VUB and Jagiellonian University, addressed the affective and imaginative dimensions of representative disconnect, with a specific focus on youth. The work package proposed to investigate how young people imagine representation, how young politicians understand their role, and how these perceptions interact with wider forms of democratic dissatisfaction.

The Brussels discussion focused on two main forms of data collection: interviews with young parliamentarians across the countries covered by the project, and youth focus groups in Brussels and Krakow. These activities were presented as crucial for understanding the gap between political institutions and younger generations, but also as methodologically demanding.

Several practical challenges were raised. Partners discussed the availability of young MPs, the possible adjustment of age thresholds, the inclusion of regional parliaments or upper chambers where necessary, the use of student workers, and the anonymised sharing of qualitative material. The need for a Joint Controller Agreement emerged as a central requirement for enabling responsible cross-partner data use.

This part of the Assembly showed that youth representation was not merely a thematic concern. It was also a test case for the project's ability to coordinate qualitative research, ethical procedures and comparative fieldwork across institutions.

COORDINATION, DISSEMINATION AND FOLLOW-UP

The management discussion concentrated on how to make collaboration easier and more reliable as the project moved into a more demanding phase. UNISI presented Nuvola as the shared cloud space for non-sensitive project material, including work-package documents, slides and General Assembly files. The need for templates for deliverables, presentations and policy briefs was also discussed as a way to strengthen the visual and communicative identity of REDIRECT.

The consortium considered whether existing tools were sufficient or whether additional platforms would improve coordination. Slack, Asana and project-management software were mentioned as possible solutions. The later exploration of EasyRedmine directly followed from this discussion, responding to the need for issue tracking, milestone monitoring and clearer assignment of responsibilities.

A proposal was also made to establish Junior Monthly Meetings. These meetings would help early-career researchers remain informed about the state of deliverables, coordinate work across teams, and maintain regular contact between the more formal consortium meetings.

On dissemination, partners discussed the use of blog posts, policy briefs, interviews, podcasts, and external institutions to increase the project's public visibility. The Assembly therefore connected internal coordination with the broader goal of making REDIRECT's findings accessible beyond the consortium.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Brussels General Assembly was both a diagnostic and a planning exercise. It clarified the state of play of the project, identified dependencies among work packages, and translated the initial conceptual architecture of REDIRECT into a set of practical priorities for 2024.

The meeting confirmed the need to treat the representative disconnect as a complex phenomenon involving citizens, representatives, parties, parliaments, governance arrangements, media environments and institutional practices. At the same time, it showed that the project's success would depend on ordinary but decisive forms of coordination: shared data rules, clear deadlines, ethical procedures, common templates, functional communication tools and regular interaction across teams.

In this sense, the Assembly helped move REDIRECT from launch to implementation. It strengthened the consortium's shared understanding of the project and defined the collaborative work required to study, explain and address the representative disconnect in Europe.

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