



A Fantastic Circus

Fediverse Integration
into Public Administration

by

FediVariety

About

This study, funded by the NLnet Foundation, explores the potential integration of the Fediverse into public administration, providing valuable insights for public entities considering its adoption. By examining the experiences of the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) with the "EU Voice and EU Video" pilot project, FediVariety aims to shed light on both the challenges and benefits of decentralized social media solutions.

This report was written by parts of the FediVariety team. Lead authorship is designated through the report. This is version 1.1, published October 2026, and may still contain inaccuracies, grammar mistakes and so forth. For feedback and/or corrections, please contact: billie@fedivariety.org

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Preface & Acknowledgements

“It was a fantastic circus for everyone involved.”

We’d like to express our deepest gratitude to everyone we’ve met on this abfab journey. It was a great honour and a fantastic pleasure to be a part of your show. Every event we attended and every informal chat we’ve had over the past few years has sparked our curiosity and shaped our thinking. This report, which you’re finally able to read, is the culmination of all that.

We dedicate this report to the ones who want change and find joy in living it. To everyone involved in our research journey on Fediverse integration in/for public institutions; a special thanks goes to the generous participants from EU institutions and all those in the EU and global Fediverse communities, to all the wonderful friends, sponsors, supporters, and fans we encountered along our journey.

Moreover, a special thank you goes to the Freedom Not Fear community, the kitchen for many of the ideas that shaped our vision and that gave us a platform to meet, disagree, learn, get inspired.

Also, we would like to thank the many reviewers that helped us smooth down inaccuracies, tone, and helped us improve readability.

Thank you all for making our exploration such a captivating quest. Your generosity, openness and willingness to share your experiences, insights, knowledge, and wisdom have truly inspired us. We’re grateful for your generosity in opening your networks and guiding us towards beautiful shared thoughts, hopes and dreams of a more inclusive, authentic, secure, and open world of honest information and communication possibilities. Let’s carry on!

We hope to see you again, if not anywhere else, then in the Fediverse.

FediVariety
October 2026

Who is this report for?

For Public Institutions

This report is designed for public institutions who are or looking to move away from commercial platforms. This report is for you if you would like to know more on what to expect if you want to begin your journey into alternative and Fediverse-related communications. It is also valuable for public institutions that have previously experimented with having an account but decided to stop. The report provides insights into what long-term engagement and community-building on these platforms could look like. Furthermore, it aims to assist those who currently operate Fediverse instances by allowing them to compare our results with their own experiences and integrate our findings into their lessons learned.

Decision-makers in public institutions will find numerous suggestions on how to fund free and open source software (FOSS) initiatives within their organisations.

For Digital Activists & Campaigners

Digital activists will find this report insightful for gaining a deeper understanding and formulating strategies to mobilize support for FOSS social media. In particular, it helps identify key decision-makers and potential partners to reach out to. A thorough examination of the narratives used by stakeholders involved in the project can aid in deciding which narratives to adopt or avoid, based on the relevant incentives and interests of different groups within public administration. Ultimately, we believe our work can contribute valuable ideas for the future development of FOSS.

For Researchers

While this report is not indented for an exclusively academic audience, our study contributes to the growing body of scholarly knowledge surrounding the Fediverse.

Billie's Logbook Files

During our FediVariety research journey, Billie Banks, our Ringmaster, cunning Manipulator, Guardian Angel and ultimate Office Manager, crafted a unique logbook. This collection includes stories and genuine quotes from real people about actual events.

Please mind that all opinions expressed are personal and organisations and quoted individuals are not responsible for any harm caused by using this material.

Billie's Logbook offers printable Fediverse wisdom perfect for wall decoration. The following overview and description covers all their files, available in A3 format here.

These logbook files are scattered throughout the report. They appear in places where Billie thought they fit: to give the readers a little break from the more serious text, to provide entertainment, and to tell stories about the Fediverse with a little twist.

Shaping a Rock into a Ball

Dive into the captivating journey of navigating the European Union's complex landscape in following Billie's logbook entry, 'Shaping a Rock into a Ball.' Learn how dedication and passion can transform even the most stubborn obstacles into smooth, achievable goals: The Art of Persistence.

Juggling the Hot Potato

With 'Juggling the Hot Potato,' Billie gains us an insider's view of European institutions daring to innovate with the EDPS Fediverse pilot, 'EU Voice and EU Video,' as they deftly balance the thrill of progress with the weight of public expectations and the complexities of open-source responsibilities.

Rocket Science Responsibility

A quick Billie chat: What if public institutions actually joined the Fediverse? Turns out it's not an IT problem —it's an accountability one. Someone has to own the data, own the moderation, own the mess. You can't just hand that to a tired sysadmin and call it

a day. Duuh.

Cheek2Cheek

At a chaotic tech camp, Billie helped cook up a deliberately absurd provocation –a fake ID system that exposed the hidden intimacy of biometric data by pushing its logic to a ridiculous extreme. The joke was the point: if surrendering your face feels normal, why does this feel outrageous?

Fisherman's Friend's Temptations

At a parliament buzzing with fresh ambition, Billie pulled someone aside to share what they'd learned: The tools and arguments –algorithms, policy arguments– are just bait. What actually works is posture. Show up human, curious, like a person not a dossier. Cast well, then listen.

4 Years Fediverse; 1 Dick Pic

In the warm, awkward honesty of the Fediverse, an interviewee stopped us cold: A tiny stat revealed something rare –a network where design and culture had quietly grown real decency...? It made Billie wonder how digital intimacy actually forms when it works.

Head of Your Own Headache

At a buzzing lounge, someone drew Billie into a quiet conversation about digital sovereignty... What it actually means to steer your own ship. Open source, they said, is the tool: same protocol, your own pace, your own forks. Freedom and headaches, braided together. Part manifesto, part seduction –Billie left wanting both.

Looking for George Clooney

In a warm, wine-fuelled debate, someone challenged Billie with a sharp question: Where are the celebrities, the sports stars, the local governments? Critics of X still use X. Politicians talk and don't move. The path to digital fairness needs leaders who actually follow through. Where's George Clooney?

A Taste of Tech Sovereignty

Someone leaned in and laid it out plainly: Mastodon isn't just an app, it's a move toward tech sovereignty —Institutions running free from big tech control. The EU's digital future needs open source, and it needs a playbook that wins over policymakers and excites the public. Let's mix politics with passion!

A Playground of Ideas and Desire

Billie ran into someone whose account felt like a playground –playful polls, careful nudges, testing what made privacy-minded followers lean in. It seemed to be built for real conversation not clout. Wow! What grew was a craft: Seduction paired with care. Genuine engagement while protecting privacy!

A Fantastic Circus

Billie witnessed Mastodon explode under the spotlight –signups surging, a community waking up– then the fire cooling for many. Newcomers fumbled between PixelFed and PeerTube, lost in a delicious tangle. Influencers prowled the ring, fueling desire for connection. The charm can fade, but the thrill of exploration?



—WARNING: The Fediverse Logbook—
This logbook features stories with genuine quotes from actual people about real events, all collected during our research on Fediverse. Images are the property of their respective owners. Opinions are personal and quoted individuals are not responsible for any harm from using this material. See [about the project](#) for more info. This is not a joke.



June, 2025

The Tangle of Protocols and Possibilities

A Fantastic Circus



We stood in the middle of a buzzing circus —lights pulsing like heartbeats. A participant leaned in, mischief in their eyes. “It was a spectacular show,” they said, calling the EU’s digital move a daring tightrope act. “We’re offering tempting alternatives —sovereignty in costume.”

They kept things visible but coy. “We want to escape the giants’ grip,” they whispered, the uncertainty around Twitter humming under their words. “A united front. Seductive, promising.”

Mastodon exploded under the spotlight; signups surged and secrets were shared. “A community woke up,” they said, excitement in their voice. But the fire cooled for many. “The charm can fade,” they sighed, mixing regret with longing.

Newcomers fumbled through the options. PixelFed glanced at PeerTube, lost in a tangled puzzle of protocols and possibilities. “It’s deliciously puzzling,” they laughed.

Influencers then prowled the ring, opening doors and fuelling desire for connection. In that fevered circus the future teased us. Shouldn’t exploration always feel this thrilling?

Billie

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Introduction

By FediVariety

“It was a fantastic circus for everyone, for the EU institutions to show that we are also offering alternatives”

In an increasingly interconnected world, the role of digital communication in public administration has become paramount. However, the European Union (EU) faces a pressing challenge, as it remains heavily reliant on social media platforms controlled by tech giants for its official communication. This dependence not only raises significant concerns about data privacy, transparency, and accountability, but also poses a fundamental threat to democratic integrity. The utilisation of profit-driven, closed-source platforms constrains content visibility, as algorithmic determinations favour personalised advertising over the public’s right to information. High-profile incidents, such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal, starkly illustrate the potential consequences of such dependencies, where the manipulation of online information has been shown to influence political opinions and undermine democratic processes.

Data Protection-compliant social media alternatives?

Despite notable legislative efforts –including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Digital Services Act– designed to curb the influence of these platforms, a critical gap persists in establishing public digital infrastructures that align with the values of democracy and open governance. This report addresses this gap by exploring the vital question: How can public administrations integrate open-source alternatives, such as the Fediverse, into their everyday operations?

The pilot initiatives “EU Voice” and “EU Video”, spearheaded by the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS), embodied a pioneering response to these challenges. By integrating self-hosted Fediverse instances into public administration, these projects offer a robust alternative to traditional social media platforms, championing data privacy as a principle and fostering greater accessibility of public communication. Launched in April 2022 and closed in May 2024, the initiative had established 40 accounts for EU

institutions on social.network.europa.eu and provided six PeerTube accounts for video hosting on tube.network.europa.eu.¹

Public Administrations on the Fediverse

While our project started out researching the EU Voice and EU Video pilot, during the course of our project we also had the chance to speak to the initiator of Social Overheid, the Mastodon instance operated by and for Dutch government entities. The growing importance of offering alternatives to commercial platforms for public institutions is evident in other notable initiatives like bund.social in Germany, social.numerique.gouv.fr in France and various public broadcasters such as the BBC. Universities and a steadily increasing number of smaller institutions are also experimenting with the Fediverse [37].

These initiatives not only enhance communication accessibility but also align with core democratic principles, such as access to information from commercial intermediaries, verifiability of official sources, and non-discriminatory access to public communication [45, 66]. Further, they are enabling online audiences to choose which platforms to use –or none at all as content is visible through the web without an account– and governments providing (social media) services themselves instead of commercially-oriented and profit-driven entities.

Yet, the sustainability of many of these ground-breaking initiatives hangs in the balance; with operational continuity often reliant on the identification of new custodians, and development of applications, features and protocols left largely to volunteers [51]. There is a pressing urgency to understand their replicability across various levels of governance and beyond. The risk of discontinuation highlights the necessity for comprehensive research into the viability of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) initiatives within public and civil society institutions. At the same time, voices from advocacy and academic groups have become louder in recent years calling for support and government funding for open networks and democratic public spheres [32, 36]. At the time of writing this report, a broad alliance of digital activist and civil rights organisations has been publishing demands towards governments including anchoring the “Plus1 principle” in their communication outreach, whereby they include at least one channel on an open, non-commercial platform.²

Lessons for future initiatives

¹Please see https://www.edps.europa.eu/system/files/2024-04/EDPS-2024-08-EUVoice-EUVideo-end-of-story_EN.pdf

²For the full list of demands please visit: <https://offene-netzwerke.eu/forderungen/>

This research report aims to analyse initiatives such as EU Voice and EU Video through a transdisciplinary lens, focusing on the socio-technical, organisational, and political dimensions of these pilot projects. Utilising qualitative research methods, including exploratory interviews with key stakeholders and document analysis of internal EU communications, and this study's aim was to generate critical insights into the factors shaping the implementation and operationalisation of open-source alternatives.

By providing a detailed account we have drafted guidelines for public administrations on how to utilise Fediverse instances, but also actionable policy recommendations for digital activists and campaigners. In an age where digital communication increasingly defines the relationship between the public and their governments, the integration of open-source alternatives is not merely an opportunity but an imperative—one that can fortify democratic engagement and promote a more equitable digital future. Thus, this research aspires to contribute substantially to knowledge around public communication strategies, empowering institutions and other organisations to take a stake in shaping this future.

Report Structure

The structure of this report is not strictly linear, nor does it have to be read entirely by each reader. In the following section, we define a few key terms and how we use them in the report. In the second chapter, we briefly introduce our methodology and the scope of our study. This is followed in chapter 3 by an in-depth account of our main subject of study—the EU Voice and EU Video pilot project case. We highlight the conditions and efforts that made the pilot happen in the first place, what happened during it at the inter-institutional level, and the impact it had after it ended. After this, in chapter 4, we dive deeper into the interpretation of results from our study. Lastly, in chapter 5 and 6, we offer recommendations to public institutions that want to start developing their own alternatives, and to digital activists/campaigners who want to push for the Fediverse and federated social media as a public-interest infrastructure. The final chapter highlights potential new ideas and considerations, and traces a possible future outlook, in light of the latest developments in the Fediverse and adjacent decentralized technologies, with the aim of inspiring action.

1.1. An Incomplete List of Definitions

By Victoria Neumann & Daniele Turra

In this section we would like to share and explain some vocabulary and key terms we are using in this report as we understand them. These are not exhaustive definitions and may vary if you search for those terms elsewhere and/or in different contexts.

Protocols

In the most general sense, protocols are sets of (in-)formal rules “referred to any type of correct or proper behavior within a specific system of conventions.” This can include forms of social norms or etiquette, e.g. shaking hands when first meeting or being introduced to someone. When it comes to computers, it works similarly as “the concept of “protocol” is as concerned with disconnection as it is with connectivity. The moment of disconnectivity is the moment when protocol most forcefully displays its political character.” Protocols are both “[...] a set of recommendations and rules that outline specific technical standards” and “the principle of organization native to computers in distributed networks.” Galloway [20] uses the analogy of a traffic system:

“Many different combinations of roads are available to a person driving from point A to point B. However, en route one is compelled to stop at red lights, stay between the white lines, follow a reasonably direct path, and so on. These conventional rules that govern the set of possible behavior patterns within a heterogeneous system are what computer scientists call protocol. Thus, protocol is a technique for achieving voluntary regulation within a contingent environment. These regulations always operate at the level of coding—they encode packets of information so they may be transported; they code documents so they may be effectively parsed; they code communication so local devices may effectively communicate with foreign devices. Protocols are highly formal; that is, they encapsulate information inside a technically defined wrapper, while remaining relatively indifferent to the content of information contained within. Viewed as a whole, protocol is a distributed management system that allows control to exist within a heterogeneous material milieu.”

In browsers, you can notice them at the beginning of an URL, for example, “https” meaning HyperText Transfer Protocol Secure. In the following we will explore the ActivityPub protocol in more detail. Another relevant protocol is the AT Protocol [64], the protocol underlying Bluesky, which also enables accounts on different servers to interact, but keeps user identity and data portable while centralising indexing and feed-building in separate large-scale services.

Fediverse

The Fediverse can be described as a galaxy of independent social media communities that can talk to each other, rather than one giant platform controlled by a single company. The Fediverse (a portmanteau of “federated” and the suffix “-verse”, as in uni- or multi-verse) refers to a distributed ecosystem of social media platforms that communicate with one another through shared open protocols. Rather than operating as a single centralised platform, the Fediverse consists of many independently run servers (called instances) that host their own communities of users while remaining able to interact with other instances across the network [39, 40, 48, 54].

The Fediverse is not a single application, nor a single type of service. Microblogging, the model most people encounter first through Mastodon, is only one among many. The same open protocols also connect video hosting (PeerTube), image sharing (Pixelfed), link aggregation and forums (Lemmy and Mbin), music (Funkwhale), and reading communities (BookWorm), among others.³ ⁴ What these services share is not an interface but a protocol [41] which is what allows an account on one kind of service to follow and reply to an account on another.

In microblogging applications such as Mastodon, this architecture creates three distinct timelines that shape the user experience:

- the personal timeline (showing activity from followed users across instances)
- the local timeline (showing activity from users within the same instance)
- the federated timeline (showing activity from any user in any instance where at least one local user is subscribed)

The federated timeline arises from the instance-to-instance relationship: when user *i* in instance *A* follows user *j* in instance *B*, instance *A* subscribes to instance *B*, exposing each instance’s content to the other in their respective federated timelines [16, 17, 44, 50, 61]. Because instances are independently administered, their operators retain control over how they connect with others in the network. Instance administrators may restrict access, make their servers private, or block users and entire instances that violate their moderation policies [7, 59, 77]. Likewise, users maintain individual control over their experience through tools such as muting, reporting, or blocking accounts [79].

As Di Cursi et al [16] put it, the Fediverse “operates on two interconnected layers: instance-to-instance and user-to-user communication. The protocol linking these layers allows instances to function “under the hood” when users from different instances interact, whether on the same or different services.” Communication between instances is made possible by one the most widely adopted of these protocols: *ActivityPub*.

³Find more information on how to join the fediverse on the website created by Stefan Bohacek: <https://jointhefediverse.net>

⁴Another good source for finding instances of cited software and more: <https://fediverse.observer/>

ActivityPub protocol

ActivityPub is the common language that lets different Fediverse servers understand and talk to each other. ActivityPub is a protocol and open standard for decentralized social networking and has become the main standard used in the Fediverse, such as on Mastodon. The ActivityPub protocol enables federation by supporting the production of content in a “universally understandable format” that allows data to travel across different servers and apps.

Developed as a decentralized social networking standard by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), ActivityPub defines how servers exchange social media activities such as posts, replies, follows, and notifications. By using a shared protocol and standardized data formats, ActivityPub allows content created on one instance to be delivered and displayed on another. As a result, users using software and instances compatible with the protocol can follow, reply to, and interact with each other even when they are hosted on separate servers.⁵

Federation and Defederation

Federation is an organisational model in which independent systems communicate and cooperate using shared technical standards while remaining autonomously governed. It allows a similar experience to email, where users on different email providers can send messages to each other because their systems follow the same communication standards, even though each provider operates independently [3, 20, 75].

Within the Fediverse, federation enables different servers to interact without being controlled by a central authority. Each instance manages its own rules, moderation practices, and community structure, while still allowing users to communicate with others across the wider network through shared protocols, such as ActivityPub [9, 10, 76].

Defederation refers to the decision by one instance to block or disconnect from another. Because each server in the Fediverse is independently governed, administrators can determine which other servers their instance communicates with [72]. When defederation occurs, the affected servers stop exchanging content, and interactions between their users become limited or impossible [70, 72]. This mechanism allows communities to enforce their own moderation standards and protect their users while maintaining autonomy within the broader federated ecosystem [56, 58, 75].

Instance and self-hosting

An instance is a single server running its own community (just like a neighbourhood within a larger city) with its own members, rules, and culture [42]. It is an individual

⁵For a video introduction into the ActivityPub protocol, please watch “How To Bullshit Your Way Through a Conversation about ActivityPub” by Evan Prodromou at <https://spectra.video/w/s8DKnnaPFw2b1JS8zD5VE8>

server that hosts users, content, and moderation policies while remaining capable of interacting with other instances in the network. Unlike centralised social media platforms, where all users belong to a single service operated by one organisation, instances in the Fediverse function as independent communities, each administered separately [14, 26].

Through federation, each instance decides which other instances it will exchange content with. Because the Fediverse is built on open protocols, anyone with the technical knowledge and appropriate hardware can set up and run their own instance, a practice known as self-hosting. Self-hosting offers a high degree of autonomy as the administrator controls the instance's moderation rules, data storage, federation choices, and community culture [49, 70, 73]. It also carries corresponding responsibilities, such as maintaining the server, applying software updates, managing backups, and handling moderation [7]. Self-hosted instances can be as small as a single user or as large as a community of thousands, and they participate in the broader Fediverse just like any other instance.

Mastodon

The name Mastodon refers both to a piece of software and to the organisation that develops it. Mastodon is one of the most popular social networks built on the Fediverse. Conceived as a decentralised microblogging application, it shares a surface resemblance to X/Twitter, where users can post short messages, follow other accounts, and can interact publicly, but differs from it in several significant ways, most of which follow from its decentralised nature.

Posts on Mastodon are called toots. Rather than being ranked or promoted by a recommendation algorithm, toots are displayed chronologically. Moderation is decentralised, occurring at the instance level according to each community's local policies, rather than through universal platform-wide rules. Users can further customize their experience by filtering out specific topics or accounts.

Other notable differences include the absence of recommendation algorithms (with "toots" displayed chronologically) and decentralised moderation, which occurs at the instance level based on local policies rather than universal censorship. Users can also customize their timelines by filtering out specific topics or users. Mastodon's contact features are similar to X/Twitter's. As with X/Twitter, communication on Mastodon can be direct (replies, mentions, or boosts, which function like retweets) or indirect (any toot that does not engage another user). Users can also like and bookmark toots. The character limit for toots varies across instances, as each instance sets its own. Mastodon instances communicate with each other, and with other Fediverse instances, via ActivityPub [28, 48, 62, 65, 78].

Often conflated with Mastodon, there is also an organisation, Mastodon GmbH. It plays a big role develops part of developing the software of Mastodon. It began in 2016 as an

open-source project by Eugen Rochko, who wrote the first code and released it publicly in October of that year, on the premise that global communication infrastructure was too important to belong to a single commercial company [48].

The organisation sustains itself through a mix of small recurring donations from users, philanthropic gifts, public grants, including EU funding through Next Generation Internet (NGI), and commercial service contracts through public procurement and for private businesses [12, 19]. Two of these revenue streams matter directly for this report. Mastodon is paid to host the European Commission's own Mastodon instance, making the developer of the software also a service provider to a public institution as it is detailed in later chapters in this report. In April 2026, it received funds from Germany's Sovereign Tech Agency, part of which used to work on synchronising blocklists across instances.⁶

PeerTube

PeerTube is a video platform where each organisation runs its own site, and those sites can follow each other's videos, instead of everyone uploading to a single company's service. PeerTube is a free and open-source federated video platform, part of the Fediverse and built on ActivityPub. It was conceived as an alternative to centralised video services such as YouTube, Vimeo, and Dailymotion [25]. What distinguishes PeerTube technically from most of the Fediverse is how it delivers content. Alongside federation at the social layer [71], it can use peer-to-peer technology so that load is spread rather than falling entirely on the hosting server when a video becomes popular. For small operators this matters directly, as reach does not automatically translate into unaffordable bandwidth costs. It also makes PeerTube a concrete case of the hybrid architecture described below, combining federated servers with genuinely peer-to-peer distribution [53].

PeerTube began in 2017 as the work of a single developer and is now developed by Framasoft, a French non-profit association, with its first stable release in October 2018. Framasoft is funded by donations and, like Mastodon, sustains PeerTube largely outside commercial channels. Main funding sources for Framasoft are grassroots donations, supplemented by targeted crowdfunding campaigns for specific releases and features, and by public grants, including from NGI Zero grant, funded by the European Commission, in 2023⁷.

Decentralised, Centralised, Hybrid

Centralised networks are run by one authority from one place; decentralised networks distribute power and infrastructure across many independent participants. Most

⁶For details please visit: <https://www.sovereign.tech/tech/mastodon>

⁷For example, see <https://nlnet.nl/project/PeerTube/> or <https://nlnet.nl/project/PeerTube-for-Institutions/>

mainstream social media can be described as centralised platforms, where all users, data, and decisions flow through a single organisation that owns and controls the infrastructure [30, 43].

The Fediverse, by contrast, is built on a decentralised architecture. As Rosnay and Musiani [57] describe it, decentralised network architectures enable "a network of peers, or equals, that allows several individuals to collaborate spontaneously", one in which "the responsibility for exchanges or communications lies at the periphery of the system, and all of its resources are distributed among several machines". The most absolute form of decentralisation is a peer-to-peer (P2P) network, in which participants share their own hardware resources (such as storage, processing power, bandwidth) directly with each other, without any central coordinating authority and can determine autonomously how it makes its resources available to other nodes [20].

As Schollmeier [63] defines it, in a true P2P network "participants share a part of their own hardware resources... accessible by other peers directly, without passing intermediary entities," making each participant simultaneously a provider and a consumer of resources. The Fediverse sits between full P2P and full centralisation: it is federated, meaning it consists of many independently run servers (instances) that communicate using shared standards, rather than a single central server or a fully peer-to-peer mesh. This makes it a hybrid architecture: more decentralised than a traditional platform, but not without any servers at all [14].

Free and Open Source Software

There are many notions for Free and Open Source Software, too exhaustive for this report, in part because the movement itself has renamed and redefined its aims over time. The software developer movement serving as the continuation of hacker ethics first became known as Free Software, and later as the Open Source revolution. Today, it is commonly referred to as Free/Libre Open Source [31, 51, 60]. In this wording, "free" refers to freedom, rather than price. Some people refer to that as "libre" (especially in the euro-speaking area), to avoid the ambiguity of the English word "free" (free as in free beer, vs free as in free speech). While there is much literature to read on those definitions, Laczkó [31] made a compelling summary: "The software developed and published by the F/LOSS movement contain four freedoms not included in closed software:

- free to use (the program)
- free to study (the source code)
- free to share (the source code)
- free to develop (the source code)."

We see the focus on granting access to information to respect those four freedoms as something that enhances the open source take used by many commercial companies,

as open source software is most often about specifications and standards. Additionally, we see FOSS as able to sustainably include the larger ecosystem of actors involved in maintaining and running it for the benefit of all impacted stakeholders in public and digital common goods [66].



—WARNING: The Fod's Variety Logbook—
This logbook features stories with genuine quotes from actual people about real events, all collected during our research on YouTube's integration of the Public Information Service. Quotes are personal, organizations and general individuals are not responsible for any harm from using this material. So, always be yourself. Unless you can be a pirate. Then always be a pirate.



May, 2024

Seduction Married to Stewardship

A Playground of Ideas and Desire



Velvet curtains closed and a mischievous smile greeted us. “Running this account felt like a playground of sensual possibility,” they said. “We liked testing the waters and teasing curiosity.”

They described playful polls and careful surveys designed to reveal what privacy-minded followers wanted. “We pushed buttons to see what made them lean in,” they admitted.

“It looked a bit like Twitter, but we rejected its habits,” they said. “Posts were quiet and thoughtful —few but rich, meant to spark deeper conversation, not chase clout.”

About the struggle with platform limits: “No YouTube flirtations,” they sighed —forced to host videos elsewhere and turn that constraint into a creative challenge.

What grew was a craft —Seduction paired with care. Seemed like they courted real engagement while protecting privacy, building a community that wanted real connection. Want to join the play?

Billie

Methodology

By Victoria Neumann & Daniele Turra

We started out our research with many questions in mind: What does it take for EU institutions to build sustainable open-source social media alternatives? What can the EU Voice and EU Video pilot teach future initiatives? In order to narrow it down for qualitative research, we set out to answer the following research question:

“How can public administrations integrate open source alternatives like the Fediverse into their everyday operations in the case of the EU Voice and EU Video pilot?”

The scale of this pilot makes it an exceptional case to study. It existed at the intersection of a FOSS-focused initiative within public administration for social media communication with their connection to political values. It was further a cross-institutional initiative. Whereas other pilots for Fediverse alternatives within public institutions have often been single organisations running or experimenting with an instance for themselves –such as the public broadcasters ZDF in Germany¹ and the BBC in the United Kingdom²– cross-institutional instances were more rare at the time our research began³.

Where pilots and initiatives did emerge, it was often data protection authorities that set them up, opening their infrastructure to other public bodies rather than keeping it for their own communication alone. EU Voice and Video followed a similar logic, but at supranational scale, across institutions with separate mandates and full autonomy over their own communication. Hence to answer our question above, our research set out to investigate three dimensions:

¹See <https://zdf.social/>

²See <https://social.bbc/>

³Other notable examples are the aforementioned French <https://social.numerique.gouv.fr/about>

Micro-level dimension

We are interested in depicting the role of building, care, repair, maintenance, design choices, and decision-making in creating and operating the self-hosted social media outlet. This will help us identify which factors shape the pilot's overall outcome, what are the challenges and opportunities of open source integration at the micro-level, and how can public administrations deal with affordances, responsibilities, cost on an everyday basis for EDPS and the involved EUIs.

Meso-level dimension

This dimension includes roles and stakeholders, as well as other entities with the goal to locate the analysis at the organisational, collective level. They make visible what Foucault [13] called “conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice.” For the pilot, this involves, amongst others, EU bodies and their relations and coordination efforts around governance and for cross-institutional collaboration.

Macro-level dimension

This dimension factors values and matters of concern in political and normative discourses that shaped the pilot. Here we are interested in debates and positions connected to the Fediverse as an open source software alternative in Public Administration within the EDPS, EU-internal and for external stakeholders within the related FOSS community.

2.1. Study Design

We used two approaches to data collection and analysis. We first collected documents via access to documents requests from institutions involved in the EU Voice and EU Video pilot. Second, we interviewed people directly and indirectly involved in the pilot or similar endeavours in the realm of federated social media integration into public administration. The study employed a qualitative method design that combines the research styles of Grounded Theory [13, 23, 68] for the interview data with methods for document analysis suggested by text documents [55]. For reference, the research style Grounded Theory sees action and research as a problem-solving process [15, 69].

This qualitative inquiry allowed us, on the one hand, to access EU inter-institutional shared pilot documents to gain insight into organisational procedures, decision-making processes, and temporal aspects of the pilot within the various involved institutions. On the other hand, interviews allowed us to collect professional knowledge, individual

experiences, embedded values, and additional context and insights from the collected documents. This enabled a more differentiated understanding of institutional processes within EU bodies related to the pilot, many of which otherwise remain undocumented. This enriched our insight into how these processes inform and structure the practices of actors in implementing and managing the pilot, as well as what knowledge is helpful for local institutions interested in a Fediverse instance.

Combining these two methods and approaches allowed us to gain insights into the aforementioned dimensions (micro, meso and macro) on what it takes to integrate Fediverse instances into a cross-institutional public administrative setting.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

In total, we conducted nine semi-structured expert interviews [8, 24] between November 2024 and June 2025 –one in Brussels face-to-face, and the others online. We obtained interviewees’ declarations of Consent before starting the interviews, explaining that we would remove identifiable data from our analysis and publications. However, due to our specific focus and small scale, it might be possible to re-identify them.

The interviews, which lasted between 50 minutes and two hours each, were transcribed and subsequently analysed according to Grounded Theory principles [13, 23] by two researchers. Initial interview partners were selected based on their roles and participation, including organisational and administrative actors, as well as users among the forty accounts for the interview hosted on the EU Voice and EU Video instances. To broaden the range of perspectives and maximise coverage, we combined direct outreach via email with snowball sampling, which led to additional interviewees.

Our empirical focus was on the EU Voice and EU Video pilot project launched by the EDPS. This initiative represents one of the first attempts within the European Union to self-host Fediverse services for inter-institutional use. In the first phase of our interviews, we focused on people directly involved. In the second phase, we included participants who were indirectly involved or were part of related initiatives. This extension of scope in the later empirical phases allowed us to gather additional contextual information for Fediverse within public administrations and to confirm some of our early finds.

The interview transcripts were analysed using an inductive Grounded Theory coding strategy [13, 67] with the help of MaxQDA software [38]. We primarily employed a bottom-up coding strategy, meaning that we allowed relevant codes and categories to emerge mainly from the interview material. This produced a set of categories and codes, which we could use to draw relations and recommendations from.

Early in the data collection process, both researchers independently coded three interviews in parallel and subsequently compared their preliminary categories. We largely arrived at the same codes, with one notable difference: one researcher treated statements about inter-organisational communication before, during, and after the pilot

as a standalone category, while the other grouped comparable passages under value-related codes. Rather than a problem, this proved productive, as through discussion and close comparison of highlighted passages, we developed a shared understanding that ultimately enriched our final coding framework.

Beyond the interview data, we drew on a second source of evidence. Parallel to conducting interviews, we extended data collection by obtaining internal documents from nine EU institutions associated with the EU Voice and EU Video pilot, submitted through access to documents requests.⁴

This approach enabled access to internal documents that are typically not public. This type of requests can be issued by using the platform made available by the European Commission to request access to documents. However, some EU bodies of our interest were not listed. That is why we opted to use the free platform asktheeu.org.⁵ On asktheeu.org all interactions between requester and institution are made public, though the platform team can redact sensitive personal information on request. It is worth noting that both the European Commission and eu-LISA requested extensive proof of our identity before proceeding, which is permitted under the regulation, even though applicants are not formally required to justify their request.

The collected documents included minutes of internal and inter-institutional meetings, internal reports on the use of social media by EUIs, internal guidelines and policy papers, project management documentation, and e-mail correspondence and related attachments. Access to the documents requested are available under https://www.asktheeu.org/user/peter_mechels/requests.

Out of 17 institutions, we got nine successful Access to Documents requests from the following institutions, an overview can be seen in the table 2.1.

We developed a cataloguing system to manage the data material, utilising the document's date, file type, and the original EUI that provided it. These documents offered insights into organisational structures, decision-making processes, institutional motivations and coordinated practices. They also informed the development of interview questions and helped identify gaps, inconsistencies or ambiguities requiring further exploration.

⁴The right of access to documents is enshrined in EU primary law under Article 15 TFEU and Article 42 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and made operational through Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001. Any EU citizen, or any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State, may submit such a request without needing to justify it. More information available here: <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-request/home>

⁵[Asktheeu.org](https://asktheeu.org) is a platform made available by the Spanish NGO Access Info Europe with a FOSS software designed to lower the barriers of requesting documents from EU institutions. Other examples are fragdenstaat.de, a similar platform for German public bodies run by Open Knowledge Foundation Germany, and to comparable national platforms elsewhere in the EU, such as transparencia.be in Belgium or imamopravoznati.org in Croatia.

Institution	Acronym	Type	Documents received
European Commission Directorate-General for Communication	DG COMM	EU Institution (Commission service)	IOCC meeting minutes, social media strategy documents, reports, budgeting documents, purchase order, email correspondence
EU Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice	eu-LISA	EU Agency	Reports, meeting minutes, email correspondence
European Ombudsman	EO	EU Body	IOCC meeting minutes, email correspondence, editorial documents, internal memos
European Union Intellectual Property Office	EUIPO	EU Agency	Presentation slides, meeting minutes, agendas, internal notes
European External Action Service	EEAS	EU Body	IOCC meeting minutes, reports, guidelines, privacy statements, email correspondence
Court of Justice of the EU	CURIA	EU Institution	IOCC meeting minutes, email correspondence, reports, annual reports
EU Economic & Social Committee	EESC	EU Advisory Body	COCOM meeting minutes, agenda proposals, internal memos
European Food Safety Authority	EFSA	EU Agency	Email correspondence, reports, presentation slides, guidelines, strategy documents
European Fisheries Control Agency	EFCA	EU Agency	Agendas, presentation slides

Table 2.1: Successful access to documentation requests: institutions and documents received

The analysis of collected documents procedure involved:

1. an initial categorisation of documents according to their type,
2. structured note-taking guided by the internal organisation of each document,
3. inductive identification of recurring themes, positions of the relevant actors, and the temporal sequence of key events.

According to Prior's [55] method for documentary analysis of text documents, this exploratory stage functioned as an annotated documentary review, supporting the construction of a plan by using initial insights from the collected documents to inform some of our interview questions. During categorisation, note-taking, and theme identification, we systematically asked two questions of each item: what is said in the document, and what the document appears to do in the setting of the pilot. Some of the insights from the collected documents helped us shape the interview questions.

2.3. Limitations

Due to the small scale of our study, we have not interviewed anyone from an organisation that actively chooses not to participate in the pilot. As the pilot was widely advertised among EU institutions, and from our interviews, discussions have taken place within institutions that ultimately did not participate. Reasons for this non-participation cannot be fully inferred from our available dataset and may be subject to further research. There were only a few mentioned by a representative within the documents collected through access requests that expressed concerns about not having sufficient resources available to be active on the Fediverse. We further encountered challenges in reaching some stakeholders for interviews, and some access to documents requests have not been completed despite multiple attempts to contact the institutions. Given the richness of the material already obtained, we judged that further escalation would not substantially strengthen our findings. The limited availability of key stakeholders occasionally influenced the scope and timing of the interviews. Finally, we refrained from labelling our participants, but due to the limited scale of our study, it could still be possible to re-identify people. We did our best to avoid such occurrences.



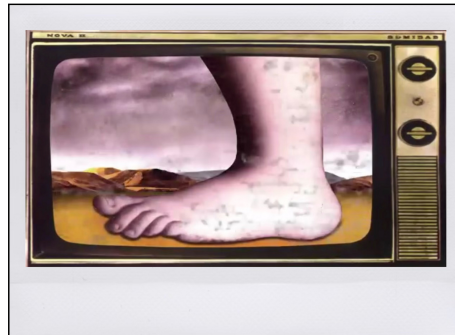
—WARNING: The Fediverse Logbook—
This logbook features stories with genuine quotes from actual people about real events, all collected during our research on Fediverse integration with Public Administration. Opinions are personal, organizations and quoted individuals are not responsible for any harm from using this material. So, sleep the peaceful. Unless you can be a pirate. Then sleep the pirate.



May, 2024

Letter to Ourselves. Before Hitting The Button

Shaping a Rock into a Ball



Navigating the European Union resembles an intimate dance —difficult yet thrilling. Hidden in the shadows of public institutions are the resistances we encounter, emerging only when we attempt to breach tricky communication barriers.

In high-stakes environments like the EU, trust and courage are crucial yet often held close, like sweet secrets. The stakes are high, and willingness to engage can feel enticingly limited.

One interviewee likened our quest for “Fediverse integration” to the challenging art of shaping a stubborn rock into a smooth ball.

Just as that requires passion and dedication, we aim to innovate public administration with new technologies.

The journey is fraught with resistance, complex regulations, and historical burdens, yet the rewards—enhanced transparency and deeper citizen engagement—shine brightly.

Ultimately, “shaping a rock into a ball” reminds us that meaningful change demands patience and resilience as we strive for responsive and inclusive public administration in this captivating digital age.

Billie

EU Voice and EU Video: A FOSS story within Public Administration

By Victoria Neumann & Daniele Turra

When investigating the story of the EU Voice and EU Video pilot, it became apparent that it is important to tell multiple stories in order to get a full picture on how the micro, meso and macro dimensions worked together and influenced each other. While this is not going to be a strictly linear or chronological narrative, we want to highlight:

- How the pilot came to be, what were the conditions under which it happened, both institutionally and politically (meso, macro);
- What happened during the implementation phase of the pilot (micro, meso);
- And what impact it had, even after EU Voice/Video ended (meso, macro).

3.1. (Political) Conditions for a Fediverse pilot

Digital sovereignty (DS) is a key term that has been very trendy and circulating in the European political sphere for a few years. It is widely used and connected to various notions, serving as an umbrella term that can be interpreted differently depending on the context in which it is used. In a recent paper, Musiani [46] call DS a "notion in the making," which is mobilised "by so-called "authoritarian" regimes", "actors in liberal democracies," as well as "'quasi-states' entities such as indigenous first nations [...], or even civil society collectives to articulate their claims for increasing people's capacity for self-determination in the digital sphere."

While there is an increasing body of scholarly literature on the topic of DS and a few systematic categorisations [?] It remains as Musiani [46] notes a "polysemic notion [...] to radically different interpretations and has entailed contrasting regulatory, policy, and technical options (Couture and Toupin, 2019; Pohle and Thiel, 2020)." For the sake of this report, instead of adopting one of these established notions or interpretations, we opted to ask our interview participants what they think about digital sovereignty. That said, some of our participants acknowledged DS as a political narrative with fuzzy boundaries.

This does not aim to have a single, definitive definition, but instead we will use it as an overlapping and interconnected cluster of understanding going forward.

Cluster 1 - (More) Independence and Autonomy

Given our field of research, it was unsurprising that some of our interviewees connected the notion of DS with independence or, at the very least, a reduced dependency on commercial social media platforms. There was an acknowledgement that governments and public institutions depend on these platforms, with a lack of alternatives; resulting in a lock-in effect, that many found worrisome in terms of the amount of political power that can be asserted. As one participant put it:

"If all the big tech companies don't provide the services anymore, LinkedIn will close, Instagram will close. Those are the primary channels being used by the government at present. So it's a big problem if there's any pressure, you call it squeezing in that sense."

As the main communication channels for governments, the interviewees highlighted problematic aspects, such as opaque rankings and algorithms "incentivised to have people pressing buttons as opposed to reading and participating in the public debate." DS was connected to self-hosted alternatives that can enable online spaces in which safer, civic discussion without the pushing of extreme views or hate speech, in which "politicians and official institutions [...] seek an open space for discussions with the citizens. And this is what Mastodon offers. Because you have "no intermediary that can meddle with your open discussion with the citizens and prioritise or deprioritise content that you post."

Fediverse pilot projects like EU Voice and EU Video are a deliberate attempt in "pursuing our [EU's] aim of digital sovereignty" by offering an alternative to "not being dependent on private platforms." This also reflects an attempt to invest in infrastructure and capacities that reduce dependence on commercial interests and enable agencies to build their own digital spaces.

Cluster 2: Choices and Value Reflection

The concepts of optionality and the freedom of choice, particularly in terms of decisional opt-in, emerge as a significant theme in the perspectives shared by participants in the discourse on decentralised social networks. Interviewees noted a centralisation of political influence alongside a concentration of economic options. Their understanding of the Fediverse diverges from a static, singular platform; rather, it is perceived as a dynamic, decentralised network comprising numerous instances and operators. This stands in stark contrast to conventional commercial social media platforms, where the

only recourse often lies in complete disengagement from the network:

"[I]n X you rely on X to do the moderation. And if they don't do it, they don't do it. What is your option? It's to leave. That's it. But with Mastodon, you have the possibility to moderate or to block accounts [yourself]."

"So it's a choice. It's a choice at the level of the account owner and it's a choice at the level of the instance owner. But at the end, people that don't like extremes, it doesn't matter if it's from one direction or another one. And again, it's a question of people's choice. To give them the choice to clean the thing they have in their eyes. But we are not there yet."

This sentiment underscores the importance of enhancing user mobility in alignment with individual values: "But that's another good thing of a diverse Mastodon. You can move from one instance to another. If you are not happy, you just move your whole thing."

Although the notion of gaining independence from commercial platforms was a prevalent theme within the discourse surrounding DS, participants acknowledged that alternatives such as the Fediverse may not entirely supplant these dominant platforms:

"So it's not like, using social networks is not like shopping for groceries, right? Because, well, one morning you can decide that you want to go to a different store and just go, and you buy your groceries there. But social networks are different. You cannot just decide one day that you will just have your account elsewhere because that comes with strings attached."

Instead, they offer a spectrum of choices for users to navigate. As one participant articulated, we are still far from achieving this ideal state, indicating the need for further transitions to be explored in subsequent clusters.

Cluster 3: Regulations, Localisation, and Enforcement

A salient inquiry in the discourse revolves around the implications of digital sovereignty in relation to regulations and legislations:

"If you're hosting on Amazon AWS a website that is not critical, but they are in the EU under EU regulations, is this digital sovereignty or is this not?"

The above question synthesises the complexities inherent in governing digital spheres. Participants highlighted the intricate landscape of compliance concerning server localisation—whether data centres must reside within specific geographic jurisdictions or simply

adhere to the regulations of particular countries¹, or in this case a conglomerate of countries within a single market approach of the EU:

“So that is the only notion of sovereignty that I can have because it actually corresponds to national laws. There are laws that are implemented nationally that concern the servers. [...] [W]here are the servers and who owns them and who is the company that owns them?”

The regulatory environment was characterised as both a “grey zone” and a “framework” for guidance in navigating the complexities of digital governance. Participants acknowledged the fragmented nature of services and infrastructure, indicating a pressing need for clarity and coherence in regulatory approaches. Furthermore, protecting consumer interests and fostering market competition through regulatory mechanisms, such as mandated interoperability, is viewed as essential. Such measures would enable platforms like Mastodon, and other emerging social networks, to attract a broader user base. This shift would facilitate competition grounded in the quality of service rather than the advantageous position of existing networks, which benefits from the challenging network effect:

“Help Mastodon or, in general other social networks that are emerging to get more users because then they suddenly start competing with the quality of the service rather than with having actually the right people on the network already”

Cluster 4: Critical Infrastructure, Technology and Power

The concept of DS is notably characterised by its approach to technological development and the corresponding investment frameworks. A number of participants have expressed their critique regarding the military connotations associated with the term, along with its implications for economic protectionism.

Critics argue that DS fails to accurately reflect the realities of software development and overlooks the substantial contributions made by developers from diverse regions, particularly in India and smaller groups within Europe. Instead, the term appears to advocate for a US-centric military framework that neglects these essential global dependencies. The notion of DS, or “strategic autonomy,” tends to dismiss these interdependencies while perpetuating a colonial and hegemonic mindset. Rather than pursuing the idea of DS or strategic autonomy, stakeholders who engage with this

¹Similar notions of the geographic and physical aspects of computing –or simply said the location of the data centres– have been discussed by Amoore [6], examining the relation of cloud computing, data and sovereignty. matters has been argued cloud computing and data in relation to sovereignty as argued by Amoore is “[u]nderstood as a spatial arrangement, materialized in and through data centres, the abstract deterritorialized cloud is thus reterritorialized as an intelligible and governable entity” as “the means of securing the state’s claim to sovereign violence.”

discourse and its associated investments should acknowledge and integrate these dependencies into their frameworks. This acknowledgement must be reflected in investment strategies and the safeguarding of critical infrastructure. One participant aptly remarked:

“We should not question whether a politician has a Facebook account – of course, they shouldn’t– but we must consider the fact that hospitals are operating on outdated software, raising significant concerns about our critical systems.”

Why this Matters for the Pilot

At the macro level, these readings of digital sovereignty clearly underlie the values and political discourses that made a pilot like this thinkable in the first place. Taken together, these four clusters do not converge into a single definition, and they were never meant to. What they show is that digital sovereignty is used to argue for independence from commercial platforms, for user choice and mobility, for regulatory clarity over where servers sit and who owns them, and, in its most critical reading, against a framing that hides global interdependencies behind a language of autonomy. Participants moved between these readings, sometimes within the same conversation.

During the EU Voice and EU Video pilot project, these interpretations of digital sovereignty were justified, at different moments and by different actors, through several of these readings at once. We aim to keep the plurality visible, rather than resolving it into one definition, to trace how a political vocabulary became an operational decision that someone had to fund, build and maintain.

3.1.1. Leading up to the EU Voice & EU Video Pilot

Next to the discourse on DS, there are other major developments that have been important for the eventual conception of EU Voice and EU Video. An overview of important events before and during the pilot can be found in figure 3.1.

Two noteworthy developments started in 2018, namely the introduction of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the initiation of Next Generation Internet (NGI). Regarding the first, when GDPR started to apply, public awareness of privacy issues on websites increased, leading to a growing number of complaints to supervisory authorities. These include issues around pervasive tracking and profiling, third-party cookie usages, tracking and combination of user profiles across websites and other services, amongst others. Further, these platforms collect all types of user data and transfer them outside of the EU.

In 2019, EDPS created a tool to automate the website evidence collection of storage and

3.1. (Political) Conditions for a Fediverse pilot

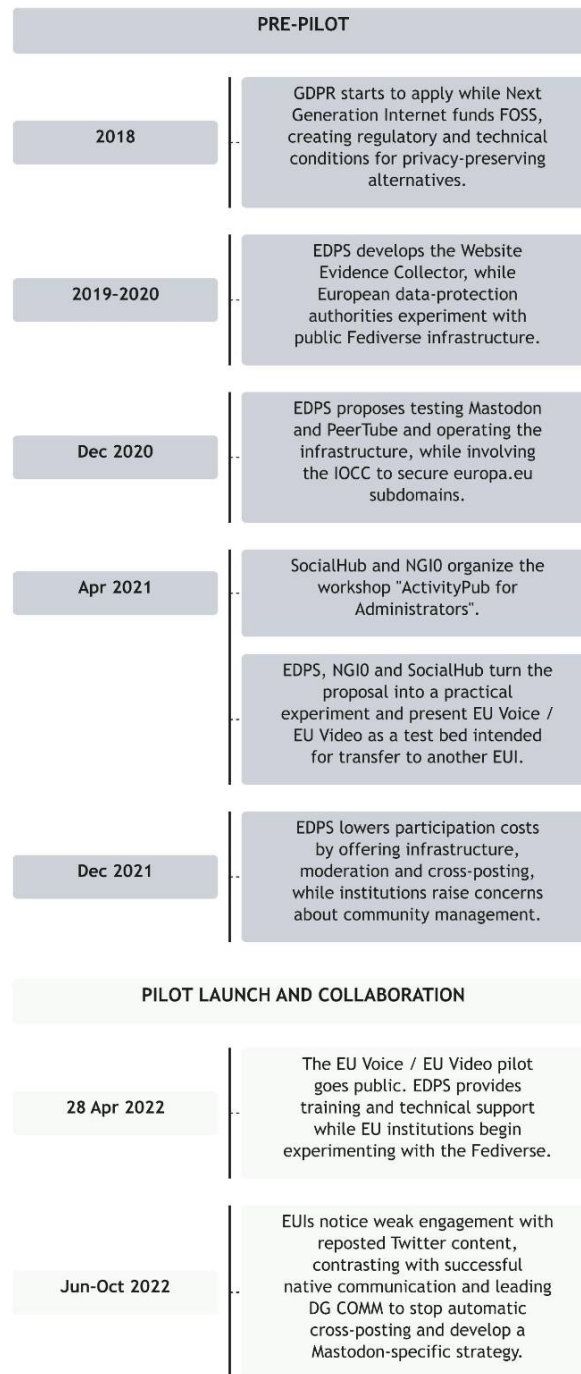


Figure 3.1: (Some) Important events before and during the EU Voice and EU Video pilot

transfer of personal data, the "Website Evidence Collector."² The tool was instrumental in showing a clear picture of shady practices carried out by several social media providers and raising awareness also among other EUIs. Ruling such as Schrems II, identifying these problems within the data protection and privacy realm and now having a mechanism to tackle it, has led to some data protection authorities being at the forefront of experimenting with alternatives.

One early Fediverse instance by a public institution was set up by the data protection commissioner of Baden-Württemberg in Germany, followed by the German federal commissioner (BfDI). Both opened their instances to other public bodies rather than keeping them for their own communication alone.³ To some degree, their mandate extends to the whole of public administration, which makes shared privacy-respecting service infrastructure an extension of their role, rather than a departure from it. Other individual data protection agencies followed, interested in testing if FOSS alternatives to commercial platforms can alleviate issues around privacy and data protection. Other experimentations with the Fediverse were undertaken by public broadcasters (such as ZDF in Germany, or BBC in the UK), which were more interested in experimenting with a new form of media and outreach.

In May 2020, EDPS holds the 47th Virtual EDPS - DPOs meeting, an inter-institutional meeting with Data Protection Officers to discuss how to protect individuals' personal data and how to hold European principles accountable with regards to their social media usage. Data gathered through the Web Evidence Collector about the current state in the use of social media by different European Union institutions gets discussed. EDPS collected data on the most common platforms in use, the number of profiles per institution, and follower counts on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. It explains how messages reach followers (submission, initial display to active followers, organic growth, paid advertising).

EDPS also raised concerns in terms of data processing practices carried out by mainstream social media providers, such as behavioural tracking and profiling, opaque training of machine learning and LLM models, targeted advertising, large-scale processing of sensitive data also shared with third-parties, processing of information outside of the EU. As mitigation ideas, the EDPS proposed a transparent access to privacy policy and DPO contacts, as well as data protection-friendly alternatives, such as Mastodon and PeerTube.

The second development crucial to understanding the conditions from which EU Voice and EU Video emerged was the Next Generation Internet (NGI) funding programme, structured around multiple thematic strands. NGI was initiated by the European Com-

²For more information, see <https://github.com/EU-EDPS/website-evidence-collector>

³On Baden-Württemberg, see the LfDI's announcement opening its instance to public bodies <https://www.baden-wuerttemberg.datenschutz.de/lfdi-oeffnet-mastodon-instanz-fuer-oeffentliche-stellen/> and the follow-up noting over 40 public bodies had since joined, see <https://www.baden-wuerttemberg.datenschutz.de/microblogging-plattform-mastodon/>

mission in 2018. Within NGI much funding went to open source projects and hence free software and open source communities within Europe.

Part of the the initiative was *NGI Zero* or *NGI0*, “a coalition of non-profit organisations” all related to and part of open source and in a wide sense European hack communities. Those organisations received part of the funding under NGI and distributed it to projects under the initiative. Funding Fediverse related development was a dedicated focus. It was “formalized as a priority when we designed the calls for the pilots, from which Fediversity⁴ comes from.” Fediverse and ActivityPub development was supported across multiple NGI funding programs and streams, not just Fediversity.

Many of the projects funded through NGI have first seen their ideation through SocialHub:

“[SocialHub] associates all the software developers that implement ActivityPub. Most of them are represented there. It is on activitypub.rocks.”

In April 2021, SocialHub together with NGI0 was organising a workshop called “ActivityPub for Administrators.”⁵ Participants came from various European and national institutions, and the ActivityPub community [11], including at least three participants from EDPS. The EDPS Technology and Security Officer at the time, gave a presentation “EUI-owned Social Media Channels to Mitigate Privacy Risks of other Channels EDPS proposal to pilot Mastodon and Peertube.”⁶ In there he presented current challenges faced by commercial social media and a proposal for what would later become “EU Voice” and “EU Video.”

This is the first public mention of the pilot, which would launch officially a year later in 2022. From the presentation, we can also learn that the pilot was in principle meant to be a test bed and EDPS always envisioned it to be taken over by a different EUI if it is successful. From the very start, EDPS approached potential candidates to potentially continue the pilot. This was later confirmed in an interview:

“For us [EDPS], it was an experiment with the idea of, if the pilot is successful, let’s try to shift it to somebody else if somebody else is interested.”

We can also conclude that sometime between May 2020 and April 2021, people leading the EU Voice and EU Video project started organising internally and starting the process of creating the pilot project within EDPS. But they also already unofficially collaborated and were “[...] very good in finding the right people to ask questions, to get help from, from the outside.”

⁴For more information visit <https://fediversity.eu>

⁵More information available on SocialHub: <https://socialhub.activitypub.rocks/t/ec-ngi0-liaison-webinars-and-workshop-april-2021/>

⁶Full presentation available at <https://socialhub.activitypub.rocks/uploads/short-url/7ZBelmODTUXFS0J4Ls0rsELtqjI.pdf>

During the workshop there were live demonstrations by a member of *petites singularités*,⁷ who was NGlo mentor and is a SocialHub moderator, on how-to install PeerTube and Mastodon instances from scratch, how to navigate the admin UI, and how federated apps work together. This hands-on session was substantial in bringing EU Voice and EU Video from a theoretical concept into practice. While this first test instance was not continued, it gave participants of EDPS the knowledge on how to do it themselves later.

What came together in this workshop are three entities aligned with a common interest to move more people and public institutions away from commercial social media platforms with questionable practices:

1. Open Source funding from the EU, which helped mature and finance projects within the Fediverse and ActivityPub development and indirectly the open source communities and individuals within it.
2. Hack, free and open source communities with a hands-on and knowledge sharing approach, and experience in organising and at the heart of the Fediverse.
3. Resistance within public administrations opposing the everyday use of commercialised social media services, with a willingness and a drive to experiment and an outlook for cross-organisational collaboration.

3.1.2. Actors and Stakeholders

The EU is a complex structure grown over many decades. Our study looked at a subset of organisations and actors within EUIs. Here we aim give context to actors and structures behind the EU Voice and EU Video pilot's implementation. This is part of the meso level, such as the organisations, committees, initiatives and relationships through which the pilot enfolded.

One such organisational structures inside the European Commission manages its own web presence. Through a framework of six activities, from planning and content to design, building, launch and maintenance, designed to keep both content and technical aspects coherent across the many EUIs publishing under the europa.eu domain. It is in the first of these, planning, that we find one of the main actors of this study: the Inter-institutional Online Communication Committee (IOCC).

Created in 2001 and known as the Inter-institutional Editorial Committee on the internet (CEiii) until November 2017, it is a permanent structure coordinating the development of the institutions' websites and overseeing the inter-institutional pages of the European Union's web portal. Inter-institutional committees are internal organisations and work across different teams from multiple EUIs. As the work is mainly about internal

⁷*petites singularités* is a French organisation committed to supporting emancipation struggles and engaging in transnational collaborations across Europe and beyond. Alongside running an online platform to create synergies among activists, they promote activities and publications that aim to counterbalance extractivist hegemony. More information on <https://asbl.zoethical.org/>

coordination, public information about is at times hard to find. Given the IOCC's role in the EU Voice and EU Video pilot project, in the following the complied and summarised what we could find on the open web. The information reported here comes largely from pages no longer available on the live web, recovered through the Wayback Machine.⁸

The IOCC works to ensure cohesive and effective online communication across EU institutions. Its mandate is about maintaining a unified web presence, enhancing accessibility and usability, facilitating information exchange, sharing best practices, and creating synergies between institutions and EU bodies on digital communication, from editorial issues to technological development.

Crucially, however, as the IOCC only coordinates without enforcing, each institution retains complete autonomy over its websites and other online channels, and takes decisions on digital strategy, operations and resources according to its own internal rules and procedures.

As a committee, its members take decisions and provide supervision over inter-institutional EUROPA websites and services:

- Development of EUROPA's inter-institutional pages (europa.eu)
- Creation of the inter-institutional standard template for EUROPA
- Allocation of third-level domain names on europa.eu
- Cooperation on databases and systems of common interest: EU Newsroom, EU Bookshop, EURLEX, EU Open Data Portal, Who's who, web archiving service

On editorial matters, the IOCC handles the development of general editorial rules, systematic linking to institutional and Publications Office document databases, coordination of online promotion for major EU events, and cooperation on social media outreach at inter-institutional level. It also oversees standardisation and reuse of web components, including the inter-institutional web archiving system, alignment of data protection and cookie policies with disclaimers and copyright notices, web accessibility policy, and the sharing of web tools and management experience.

Originally created to supervise the EUROPA website, the IOCC emerged as the most suitable candidate to coordinate collective efforts around the EU Voice and EU Video pilot project. The identity presented on EUROPA is itself continuously negotiated between multiple agencies and managed as a shared good; similarly, the EU Voice and EU Video pilot project was intended to host accounts from multiple EUIs, each potentially representing itself differently. The IOCC was involved to ensure general editorial rules were respected, that agreement on third-level domains was reached, that coordination between participants was fostered, and that best practices were shared.

⁸For more information, see https://web.archive.org/web/20191004071232/https://ec.europa.eu/ipg/basics/management/committees/ceiii/index_en.htm

The IOCC comprises representatives from various EU institutions and is chaired by a representative of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM). Other Commission participants include the Secretariat-General, the Directorate-General for Informatics (DG DIGIT), and the Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT).

At the time of our research, members from outside the European Commission represented: the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the European Central Bank, EPSO, ECHA, EEA, the Publications Office, the EDPS, the European Ombudsman, the European Investment Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the European Stability Mechanism, and eu-LISA.

Given the focus on social media, several IOCC members were involved in the Social Media Working Group, a sub-group operating within the IOCC. It focuses on strengthening inter-institutional cooperation on social media by coordinating outreach efforts and aligning editorial practices. As we will see, this was the main space of debate for the adoption of EU Voice and Video.

3.2. How to Fediverse (Cross-Institutionally) for Public Institutions

"The way the EDPS has set it up, it was easy. You create an account, you give it to your communications department."

The main focus of this section is about the EU Voice and EU Video pilot; when it fitted thematically we added quotes and information from other initiatives and interviewees. First, we were interested in what it takes to operate, run and collectively use alternative social media for public institutions. Here we are highlighting the micro-level tasks such as the technical hosting, moderation, the financial costs, and so forth. Further, we discuss governance and inter-institutional organisation. Lastly, we were interested in the experiences of involved institutions into using the Fediverse for outreach. Together these make up the micro level of the pilot, the everyday work of running it, with the meso level never far away whenever coordination between institutions came into play.

3.2.1. Technical Aspects of Self-Hosting

"It works. It's easy to run. It's easy to configure. It's super easy to migrate your data. Nothing went wrong. It kept running."

Self-hosting was often described as simple. An initial set up is done within a few hours, and then it might take a few hours per month to look after it. The time needed for the

technical administration is somewhere between “30 minutes” to “half a day a month.” Throughout the pilots of EU Voice and EU Video and social.overheid.nl, neither reported any technical difficulties or issues, more that “it went really smooth and it went really well.” Our participants emphasised how robust the instances on the technical side are, for example, that those might need “a reboot maybe three times in the last two years” for updates and the like. Participants pointed out how easy it is to integrate it into existing technical settings and infrastructure:

“You have the integration with the CMS [Content Management System] and then you are in Drupal or you are in WordPress and you can do your content and then you click a button and it’s online.”

To add to this point, for both Mastodon and Peertube, the EDPS used Ansible for automating server management tasks and further simplifying and reducing manual involvement.

Participants further pointed out that most public institutions are already well suited to have their own instance. Most do have their own website already, meaning that they have a domain space which they can use to and just need to redirect to their instance. Being under this “DNS hierarchy,” has several advantages.

First, it is immediately recognisable if an instance is from an official government website. For example, all EU bodies have a website under the europa.eu domain.⁹ For single institutions it is relatively straight forward. However, from various documents we know that it was a bit of a discussion what appropriate domain names for the cross-institutionally EDPS pilot could be. Since all proposed options involved subdomains under europa.eu, EDPS approached the IOCC as early as December 2020, presenting a general concept and initiating efforts around a few potential subdomains, more than a year before the pilot’s official launch. After several suggestions, in the end EU Voice was under <https://social.network.europa.eu/> while EU Video could be found at <https://tube.network.europa.eu/> (now both defunct).

Second, by self-hosting, public institutions are “demonstrating a presence and an engagement and protecting your brand also.” Having control over the name and branding, was set in contrast to having an account on commercial platforms, where public institutions have no control over their name, brand, or even account. Self-hosting was attributed to public institutions to be able to have their “own voice.” Another aspect for EDPS undertaking the self-hosting was the duality of being both an administrator and a user within their own system. This was not only the case when it came to technical issues, but when it came to organising roles, distribution and responsibilities, for example, when taking privacy and data protection into consideration. However, the established process by the Data Protection Officer was “quite smooth.”

⁹The European Commission’s (EC) website is ec.europa.eu, EDPS’s website is edps.europa.eu, and so forth. The current EDPS Mastodon instance can be found under <https://social.edps.europa.eu/@EDPS>

It surely did help that those driving forward these pilots were either coming from a technical background or having a strong affinity for technology. Some of our participants were hosting their own private or sometimes even community-based instances, and were expressing the joy in experimenting with open source technology in this way. There was a recognition that self-hosting is an “interesting option for technical savvy people” for which setting up an instance will be incredibly easy, but “not everybody is able to implement Mastodon.” One participant was introducing people from public administrations by voicing frustration that public officials often “do not know how to log into a server” and showing them what’s happening on a server for “them is just completely exotic.” So self-hosting is an interesting option because “as long as it’s easy, it’s very good.”

What are the other options instead of self hosting? We also talked with another NGlo programme established by NLnet called Fediversity, which aims to make self-hosting even easier in the future. Fediversity, according to a participant, “should be called instance as a service. So it’s a cloudification of the operation of the instance.” In this context the idea of “micro cloudlet providers” came up, “which is a smaller organization [...] in which you have enough system administrators, experienced service desk people, so people can communicate [...] be able to run the platform [...] on a 24/7 basis and scale it really well.” With these micro cloudlet providers, public administrations and other organisations could have a service provider taking on responsibilities such as the hosting of the servers. Still having an instance under their own domain, despite it being managed from a service provider, was highlighted during interviews as a way to maintain control while having the option of full portability between service providers.

Documents show that the option of externalising the hosting was explored before the EU Voice and EU Video pilot ended, both by EDPS and other institutions, such as the European Commission with Mastodon GmbH and a Dutch service provider, Procolix. Choosing a hosting provider within the EU would also have the advantage that they have to comply with EU and national law. Further it would boost the local economy and open source business models through public procurement, as public administrations “procure software for everything.”

With the Fediverse being decentralised, it is a partly a technical question and partly one of organisational and role/responsibility distribution whether you want to self- host, in the sense that each public organisation or institution will have their own instance or whether you want to bundle together and have multiple organisations under one umbrella. There is no straight forward answer to what will best fit for each setting and context. Even our participants had diverting opinions to what would be preferable. On the one hand were arguments which highlighted each institution having their own instance will be good for straightening the decentralised network that the Fediverse is. The more instances, the better and it “works to the advantage of the network because you have all of a sudden, what is it, 15 extra instances if it all works out.”

3.2.2. Costs and Funding

"I was very surprised by how little money they had to spend for the pilot."

Self-hosting requires resources and monetary funding. In our case, the EU Voice and EU Video pilot was self-funded internally by EDPS for approximately €200,000 for about two years. The situation was similar for the Dutch Social Overheid pilot. Which meant the institutions funded the pilot projects from their own budget, passing their own internal review process. Essentially, those pilots were experiments coming from the motivation of those conducting and collaborating in it: "There is no higher power that says we shall therefore here's a million and make it so and figure this out."

There are two main cost factors. First, technical infrastructure. Deciding to experiment with self-hosting, EDPS also bought some server capacity, which at some point during the pilot had to be extended, it changed "when we were growing a bit with the storage and also the performance of the server." The eventual server costs were similar in both pilots, even with an extension of capacity, remaining in "[...] the lower thousands.

The second cost is time as in FTEs of personnel "who are already part of the payroll anyway" to work on the pilots. This included personnel with certain types of expertise –such as technical, data protection, communication as one participant explains:

"We did have [...] the salary of the technical person, the salary of the project manager so that those get factored in as well. But still even with those costs it's a very little money."

Amongst all our participants there was a shared sentiment that there is a low threshold of financial implications running an instance or even a whole pilot project. This low threshold of money was regarded both as a positive and "one of the trickiest things." On the one hand it was seen as a selling point to self-host an instance, because you can easily "find that money" within the internal budget of your public institution. There was an agreement that money was not an issue because it "is really cheap." So cheap in fact, multiple participants made statements including "It doesn't cost anything", "nothing", or "next to nothing." Just to reflect right after: "Well, a bit in time, but it's my time. But it's not money for us."

Participants pointed out "there are probably multiple factors like capacity, difficulty to measure the cost." The issue capacity was mentioned by many. This included taking on responsibility to manage the additional outreach channel, harmonising it with the existing workflows and social media strategies. This human labour and effort was emphasised as an affordance:

"[Y]ou need to have people who post there, who do the community management, who, you know, reply to posts where people interact with your content and so on."

For smaller institutions with limited capacity, the option to self-host and have a pres-

ence on Mastodon is seen as costly and resource-intensive as it places a burden on staff and infrastructure. Rather than it being a monetary issue, “at the end, it’s all about money for impact.” Impact was not ultimately defined, but it was connected to how much outreach it generate: “It really boils down to the ratio of invested efforts and the people that will actually read the content on that communication channel.”

The financial and other cost implications of running an instance was also seen as an investment where

“[...] you pay a price, that’s true, but it’s the price of your freedom. And freedom has a price.”

3.2.3. Governance

“From a governance point of view, it even helps, because then you are the owner of yourself, and that’s it. You don’t have to justify the decision taken on various occasions, with other institutions, with other users.”

The EU Voice and EU Video pilot was initiated and facilitated by EDPS. With EDPS having the pilot as their own internally funded project, they had to organise the facilitation of it. Being the facilitator of it, meant both responsibilities and freedom to experiment “[...] within the boundaries of [...] guidelines issued by, for instance, the IOCC in terms of communication, service level agreement with other institutions.”

Three interconnected aspects were highlighted within the interviews: First, creating documents, most importantly terms of services and privacy notice, but also comprehensive guidelines to share with participating institutions and account holders. Second, it was about deciding on rules and modalities of their instance: i.e. who is allowed on the instance. And third, handling the data during and after the pilot.

The first big governance task is creating comprehensive guidelines, for example data protection and Term & Conditions, but also “guidelines for the EU institutions on how to use it, trying to uniform a bit what we, how to use it all together.” Governance was initially a complicated endeavour for EDPS “because in the end, we are the regulators. We are the ones that should check on the others the way they process personal data.” In the beginning governance was not at the forefront of the pilot, but it quickly led to questions such as: “Who’s the controller? Who’s the processor? How does it work? We have a server. Are we the owner of the servers? Are we the owner of the data of the people?” In a short two-pager of the terms and services of EU Voice and EU Video from December 2021, EDPS opted for joint data controller ship with participating account holders (i.e most of them EUIs). EDPS remained the data processor as their role of technical administrator and hosting. In order to have an outside regulator and data protection authority, the document lists the German Federal Data Protection Authority, which at the time already had their own Mastodon instance running.

Regarding the second governance task, many Fediverse instances follow some adapted terms and services, they also have server rules on what they allow on their instance. This can be pretty diverse, depending on the political, social or other specialisation of the specific instance. Some instances are open for sign-up, are invite-only, while for others you have to “apply” to make sure you are not a bot and/or align with the political orientation and server rules. The scope of accounts is by no means a simple task within cross-institutions instances. Questions whether every employee of an official institution can have an account needed to be explored. So, to avoid greater discussions in the direction “How come they have an account and we don’t?” in the end, EDPS decided EU Voice and EU Video “[...] was open for EU institutions, bodies, and agencies, plus some VIPs.”

This expansion of account scope was an iterative process. In the beginning the idea was to create instances for EUIs, but EDPS has gotten requests from different services and individuals, including “commissioners, of course, because our supervisor had the account, our secretary-general had the account, and also other commissioners decided to open an account.” Gradually, accounts expanded to some directors, as well as some smaller services and projects within institutions. At some point EDPS was approached by MEPs from the European Parliament, and approaching the European elections, they decided to open up to both MEPs and political parties.

The third aspect concerns what happened to the data during and after the pilot. This proved less settled than the first two. While the terms of service addressed controller-ship and processing during the pilot’s operation, what should have happened to accounts, posts, and follower relationships once EU Voice and EU Video ended was not spelled out with the same clarity. In practice, this meant institutions considering their own instance, such as the European Commission and EDPS itself, had to work out data continuity on a case-by-case basis, rather than following a shared procedure established during the pilot.

3.2.4. Moderation

Moderation was one of the topics we expected to be more challenging, but to our surprise it wasn’t much of an actual issue. Most of our participants never had any issues of seeing a lot of extreme views or hate, or illegal on the Fediverse.

EDPS organised within their own organisation to monitor and deal with any issues coming up as part of their communication team “checking on the content that was flagged.” In the majority of cases they had to deal with EUIs “complaining about the comments received.” The complaints sometimes reached EDPS via email. While account holders also have the ability to block single accounts or instances from their own feeds, flagging them for the moderation team triggers a process in which it could be blocked for the whole instance. This was not without complication, however, because “[...] you have to assess how to do that. So we were trying to leave as much space as possible to people because we don’t want to censor anyone.” In the majority of the cases there

was no action taken:

“We were receiving many, many notifications against the European Commission, mainly, but also other institutions. But just for the sake of to be anti-European, I guess, or to be against a specific institution. And those, to be frank, they were always, always skipped, because it was just spam.”

Potential censorship and freedom of speech was one aspect to balance during moderation practices. Another one was blocking users and instances would restrict access to official communication channels, which needed to be weighed against “the possibility to interact with us [EUIs].” While EDPS was trying not “to block instances because it’s not fair,” the general practice was mainly temporary restricting single users or accounts, sometimes blocking them. In “very, very few cases”, “when we were attacked, we blocked those entire instances” which were “really flagged as potential [...] trolls and haters.” Over the course of the 2-year pilot they had to step in “a few times,” but a participant made an noteworthy observation:

“What you do see in the recent time is content generating bots, mostly, I think, feeded by AI. That’s not exclusive to Mastodon.”

A participant recalled there was “some spamming activity” where “like a user or something that was constantly spamming us.” One spam wave impacted the pilot, but for most participants they simply “had a lot of notifications [laughing]. But it’s fine.” This needed to be dealt with technically, and within a few hours. There might be multiple reasons for this:

1. The pilot only allowed official EUIs, a few sub-programmes, and a handful of accounts attached to individuals, such as MEPs. Therefore, the accounts were posting within their roles, and EUIs are not known for trolling. While there were terms & services provided by EDPS for the instance, this was not something they had to enforce on their own instance due to the professional nature of it. Hence, most of the work is blocking outside attackers, threats, and unwelcome comments.
2. Despite not using any blocklists for EU Voice and EU Video, a lot of the moderation on the Fediverse is also done in user’s own instances.

This holds for most of the accounts we interviewed. The picture looks different for the largest ones: in October 2022, DG COMM reported a growing number of complaints, along with spam, hate speech, explicit content, and trolls that were not always easy to moderate. Moderation load, in other words, appears to scale with visibility and follower count rather than being an inherent property of the platform.

3.2.5. Experiences Using the Fediverse for Institutional Outreach

All of our interviewees reported having a very positive experience on Mastodon, and using it for institutional communication is “very fun.” However, using Fediverse for out-

reach means getting used to social media platforms that work differently. Even among our participants, not everybody was aware of the existence of Fediverse platforms before the pilot. Hence, many of our participants were treating the Fediverse “bit of a playground” or “testing ground.”

There was considerable experimentation and “test[ing] the waters” among the participating institutions and accounts to find out “things that work and others that don’t work” to create more outreach and reach a wider audience.

From the documents collected through access requests we know that institutions we didn’t interview also tried several strategies to create engagement and outreach, but not all of them succeeded in growing their follower numbers or getting many retweets. Some participants have also experimented with the different features, such as creating dedicated hash tags for recurrent themes in their content, but it was subsequently dropped. And while not all strategies worked uniformly for each institution, this experimentation enabled the institutions to work out “at least we know what works better than others.” As one participant noted:

“For us as a team [...] it was a nice test for us to start a new platform kind of from scratch and also be among the first ones. So overall for us, it was like a nice branding exercise and how to brand yourself in a completely different environment, how to stand out.”

While there are some challenges when it comes to using Fediverse, most participants reported that it was easy to use. Rather than finding it challenging, it meant adapting and it was “more like adjusting” existing work flows. Aspects such as adjusting visuals were deemed easy and there were “no issues with the requirements” and had “more or less same sizings” like commercial platforms. However, participants told us they switched to another content management and scheduling system such as Buffer that also works with Mastodon. Further, they needed to familiarise their team members and sometimes their wider institutional setting on how Mastodon works.

Creating a comprehensive social media strategy pays off when trying to establish a presence on Mastodon and you “[...] need to also invest time and ideas.” We collected different strategies that worked for our interviewees:

1. Prioritizing technical, privacy and security content.

Many of our interviewees emphasised how specific topics drove their engagement with users:

“[T]he audience is very often very data privacy driven.”

One strategy that they reported worked for them was trying “to stick more to like tech type of content.” Interests of users were a reflection on the current active user base on Mastodon. Our participants even recommended some public

institutions to find their niche audience, as “[..] open source is very interesting to a lot of people out there.” Mastodon was described as “the right place for you to stay, especially if you are a data protection authority.”

2. **Aligning content with LinkedIn (instead of X/Twitter) and longer knowledge sharing treads)**

“[I]f you look at it, it does look like a bit of a version of Twitter, right? Like from the user perspective, but we really tried not to treat it as Twitter.”

Longer content – “more detailed than a tweet” and in which “you don’t have to just summarize things” – was another key for success. One participant described that they would turn longer posts that would normally post on LinkedIn, they turned into threads on Mastodon. Instead of announcements and “easygoing videos”, the content posted on Mastodon “was a bit more serious compared to Twitter.” Another reason given for the alignment with LinkedIn was catering to a niche, technical audience would require the use of technical jargon, which typically would make posts longer. When trying to simply mirror X/Twitter, the response was not as welcoming.

Automated crossposting from Twitter was the most common way institutions participated in the pilot, but also the least effective. Using threads instead allowed social media managers to get better results, with direct impacts on posting frequency. Instead of posting shallower content more frequently, this institution reduced the posting frequency for longer content. And it still worked for them:

“People and users of Mastodon, they know. They know who you are. They know what you do. And they interact with you on a certain level, not a very basic level.”

Having a smaller, less broad community on Mastodon influenced the type of posts the institutions were posting, but had a positive effect and participants reported it being a “very good way to get feedback from interested parties.” With an interactive, and knowledge-hungry audience, any institution that shares knowledge or does tell-alls, had a winning strategy.

3. **Having regular quizzes and polls.**

Using polls and quizzes had a double effect: It did boost engagement, and it shaped future outreach approaches as it helped “to understand what kind of content is expected, like what kind of content people would engage with.”

Participants noticed – compared to corporate social media – the engagement with polls and quizzes had a different quality: “People were really providing inputs and questions and comments.”

Quantitatively, interaction with the content was also higher in relation to the size of followers and general users on Mastodon:

“So usually polls had really good engagement. We would have like really 300 replies even sometimes, which is like quite nice for, for a small community because we had, I would say up to 3000 followers.”

4. Engaging with users.

“Make a plan because it’s not just having an account. This won’t work. It would even backfire to you because then you will be criticized.”

With a few exceptions, there was almost universal consensus amongst our participants that engagement is an important key for successfully establishing a presence on Mastodon:

“And we had not so many followers at the beginning. But at some point, we started using it more. The reaction was clear. People were happy. They were super interactive. And they want to be interactive compared to others.”

This focus on interaction, however, also consumes resources, as one participant notes: “But then you have to write down, okay, this is the time I can spend on this.”

Overall, the audience on Mastodon was described as being friendly, but detail-oriented and unforgiving. Unforgiving in a dual sense. First, they demand interaction. While for some accounts it worked just broadcasting, especially bigger ones such as the European Commission, they can afford not to reply to everyone. However, interacting with replies is another important aspect for success. Second, they will point out mistakes you make. Having a technology-interested audience means, the nerds will come after you. But in a friendly way:

“So the community was very open and honest, but also they do not permit mistakes because of that [their knowledge]. They are really [unforgiving] but nice.”

Being asked for more detail, pointing out inaccuracies, or making comments was also seen as a quality indicator “because of that, you can also see that users are actually engaged and they read your content.” Many of our participants recalled this as a positive experience and “like the fact that people would really read and check the information and they found some kind of issues or they found inaccuracies, they would comment.”

Posting Practices and Internal Workflows

Posting practices varied starkly between participants. This was partly due to the different sizes of accounts/institutions we interviewed. Some had a dedicated social team harmonised content across different social media platforms. For one of the public institutions we interviewed, they were in luck having an intern who had experience in being on the Fediverse. It became their own internal project to align their institution's social media strategy for Mastodon. While others we interviewed again had only the person in charge, would post directly to Mastodon.

This difference in capacities impacts their posting practices, and participants reported “[...] it's a bit of interacting in some few cases,” but generally their ability “to exchange is a bit limited.” Smaller units seem to have a more direct approach to posting on Mastodon, without much of a formal process:

“I don't discuss it internally, to be frank. At the unit level, everybody knows there is such an account and my colleagues, they are giving, feeding me with things from time to time and I push that. That's the way it works. That's this official editorial policy.”

Another factor within posting practices was frequency. With Mastodon having a linear timeline by default, we were wondering if the time of posting something, and the frequency mattered. Posting frequency varied significantly between participants, most reported to post within a range of “try[ing] to do it once a day” to a few times a week. However, even the more successful (in terms of retweets and follower count) accounts reported they sometimes only posted once a week.

Lastly, some used their account to broadcast and announce, but with limited interaction with other users. While engagement is typically rewarded, this was a surprising result. This seemed to work for both bigger and smaller institutions. Success factors seemed to have enough stakeholders within the current Mastodon user base. Bigger institutions such as the European Commission can mirror and use mastodon as an announcement portal, because enough of their posts will interest an audience that will discuss and comment on posts regardless of the limit or absence of direct replies. The smaller institution we interviewed was mainly posting “institutional information and calls and results of calls and projects,” which included topics around privacy, open source, and EU policy, hence also “very interesting to a lot of people out there [Mastodon].”

In summary, conditions are easier for institutions that match already existing interests of a large user base on Mastodon: tech-oriented, privacy-focused and interested in data protection. This can change, however, with a growing user base and a diversification of instances. This might include a shift in topics that resonate and the general culture and behaviours of the user base.

3.2.6. Inter-Organisational Aspects

“But that's what open source does. We find ways to collaborate.”

There was a lot of inter-institutional (i.e. EUI internal) collaboration, which framed the pilot. The inter-institutional organisation of EU Voice and EU Video was praised as “a great cooperation” by all our interviewees who were directly involved: “[..] it went well, the collaboration as well with all the entities.” As EU Voice and EU Video was meant for potentially all EU institutions, EDPS organised and collaborated with many stakeholders. This inter-institutional organising was going along three lines: First, preparing and setting up the pilot; second on-boarding and involving participating organisations during the pilot, and third advocating for the adoption of the Fediverse and eventual take over of the pilot. The latter one spanned across pre-, post- and during the pilot phase.

In the pre-pilot phase, EDPS worked together with the European Commission’s Open Source Programme Office (EC OSPO) and DG-CNECT, and DG COMM. When they promoted the pilot, they used all kinds of “[...] channels, but it’s usually direct contact with people.” And they were “surprised to see so much engagement from other institutions.” When “DG COMM and the EDPS announced the pilot together and everybody told us, look into institutional services.” One of those “services”, the IOCC, became integral for the inter-institutional organisation of the pilot. It became an anchor point throughout the pilot, but EDPS and OSPO organized calls mostly every two weeks to say: “How’s it going? Do you have any issues?”

Beyond the IOCC, two further services appear in the documents we analysed, both relevant to why the pilot developed as it did. The ICT Advisory Committee (ICTAC) and the Inter-institutional Committee on Digital Transformation (ICDT) operate at a higher level than the IOCC, channelling political support from IT Chief Officers of EU institutions. Their support however was notably absent, but shows how EDPS tried to gain support and approached the pilot from many different potential angles.

EDPS created and distributed guidelines via IOCC meetings, how-to use and informed participating parties of updates and changes throughout the pilot. More in particular, in March 2022 (a month before the official launch to the public), the EDPS organized a training for all EUI, explaining the rationale for the pilot project, the relationship with the IOCC, guidelines on creating and managing an account and the tools made available. Governance and other documents were sent to the IOCC “to comment in case they had something to say. And it was adopted very easily.”

The pilot launched on Thursday 28 April 2022, with EDPS inviting all EU institutions, bodies and agencies to participate on a voluntary basis. Given its experimental nature, the launch was deliberately kept separate from the communication activities around Europe Day on 9 May. A disclaimer on the instance’s homepage explained the nature of the pilot and its limitations in scope and participating institutions. Apart from EU Voice and EU Video being a regular topic within IOCC meetings, there were also support calls to collect additional feedback. Onboarding was designed to be as low-friction as possible. As one interviewee framed it: “The way the EDPS has set it up, it was easy. You create an account, you give it to your communications department.” And this

lowered barriers for on boarding, as EDPS “take[s] care of it and it’s just like you post it here”. Furthermore, EDPS served as a point of contact for any participating institution and account holder. Apart from EU Voice and EU Video being a regular topic within IOCC meetings, EDPS also held additional support calls to collect feedback and offer guidance.

Participation grew steadily over the first eight months. As of 30 March 2022, EU Voice hosted three EDPS accounts, four DG DIGIT accounts, the European Ombudsman, the EU Agency for the Space Programme and the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, while EU Video hosted two EDPS channels and the European Ombudsman. By 21 November 2022, sixteen EUIs were present on EU Voice: alongside those already mentioned, the European Commission and EC DIGIT, the Intellectual Property Office of the EU, the European Labour Authority, the EU Translation Centre, eu-LISA, the European Court of Justice, Next Generation Internet, the Open Source Programme Office, the European Investment Bank, and EU Sanctions. By the end of the year EEAS had joined too, and Commission staff were asking for an extension of the pilot phase and a high-level meeting early the following year.

EDPS also provided reports, and plans throughout the pilot for institutions. For example, they presented plans for making the pilot long-term viable. This involved both finding a successor EUI, and engaging with the developer community. Most likely candidates were bigger institutions such as the EU Commission and the European Parliament, as they would have bigger capacity and in contrast to EDPS potentially a mandate for organising public communication for and within EUIs. While there has been support from participating organisations and even individual MEPs pushing for Fediverse adoption, there was “not a unified [outreach] strategy among European institutions.”

3.3. Impact of EU Voice and EU Video

While procedural coordination at the meso level ran smoothly, the depth of actual engagement varied considerably between institutions, and this unevenness was visible from the very beginning. A very shortened version of a timeline of some frictions during EU Voice/Video and important events of the post-pilot phase can be found at figure 3.2.

Already in February 2021, more than a year before launch, DG COMM pointed out that the Fediverse holds a people-centered dynamic, where meaningful conversations can take place, and recommended to use personal accounts of individuals working for EUIs, making explicit they work for EUIs and connecting with Fediverse users by “taking the effort to engage.” Contextually, the European Environment Agency raised concerns about follower retention, questioning how to build engagement on Mastodon without losing existing audiences on mainstream platforms, a signal of thin availability of resources to spread across multiple platforms.

By March 2021, a distinct pattern had emerged among social media managers consulted through the IOCC. Several institutions supported the initiative in principle, as

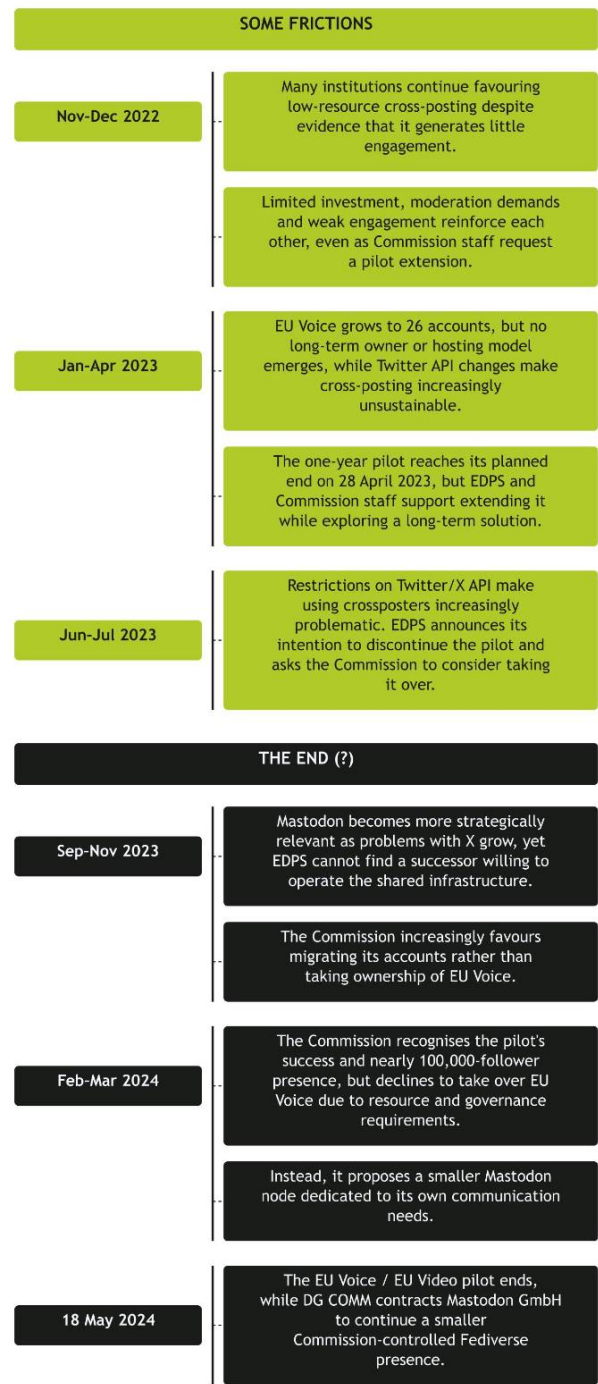


Figure 3.2: Post-pilot events and frictions

an endorsement of FOSS and privacy-preserving options, while remaining unwilling to commit editorial resources to it. Worried about reputational damage, social media managers from many other institutions expressed similar concerns and opted for cross-posting from Twitter, and avoided diluting engagement efforts until a clearer strategy emerged. The European Parliament, for its part, flagged the need to assess resource requirements and identified "one-way communication" as a risk of poor citizen engagement.

Crossposting thus became the default mode of participation for much of the pilot. EDPS responded to demand by offering a Twitter-to-Mastodon crossposting service, presented to the IOCC Social Media Subgroup in December 2021. By June 2022, DG COMM was reporting that interactions had decreased substantially, as followers showed little interest in reposted Twitter content. In October 2022, alongside complaints from followers about excessive crossposting, DG COMM paused the automatic crossposter altogether and developed a dedicated Mastodon strategy instead.

The contrast was immediate. That same month, DG COMM shared Thierry Breton's post on the Digital Services Act, responding to Elon Musk's "free bird" remark. The post broke the account's interaction record on the platform and quadrupled its follower count within days. It appeared clear that original, timely content worked, while automated mirroring did not.

However, this lesson did not travel evenly. In September 2022, eu-LISA joined the pilot while still asking about the crossposting tool, and by November 2022 many EUIs were still discussing the crossposter in email threads, even after DG COMM had explicitly raised reposting as an unviable engagement strategy. What emerges from the documents is something close to a self-fulfilling cycle: communication officials saw limited incentive to invest resources in a platform with a seemingly small audience; minimal original content led to limited engagement; limited engagement then justified further minimal investment. The absence of active moderation and bi-directional interaction suggests institutions were treating the Fediverse as a passive distribution channel rather than an interactive space.

Underlying all of this was a structural absence. As early as June 2021, EDPS had noted that political support from the European Parliament and from heads of EU institutions, channelled through bodies such as ICTAC and ICDT, was lacking. The pilot had procedural backing through the IOCC, but no political mandate above it. This is the backdrop against which the end of the pilot, and the search for a successor, should be read.

Looking For a Successor

So, after an initial extension beyond April 2023 as requested by the EDPS and the EU Commission, the EU Voice and EU Video pilot successfully ended in May 2024. The search for a successor was not successful. The most concrete candidate had appeared

early. Already in March 2021, correspondence we obtained shows the Publications Office as potentially willing to take over the infrastructure once the pilot ended, and EDPS met with them again in December 2022 to discuss possible involvement through the IOCC. It remains unclear from the documents we obtained why this did not materialise.

This unsuccessful search was not without impact, however. Some EUIs, most prominently the EU Commission and the EU Court of Justice have set up their own instances. It must be noted that they are not hosting their infrastructure in-house, but have externalised the hosting to Mastodon GmbH. When we were interviewing EDPS, they were exploring the possibility to externalise hosting as well. At the time of writing this report, EDPS has set up their own instance with the technical hosting done by Procolix, a Dutch SME which was also part of Fediversity.

Our interviewees had mixed reactions towards the decision to end the cross-institutional instance and towards the recommendation to self-host (whether it meant doing it in house or external). Some even criticised the decision of the EU commission not to self-host in-house, because “it’s not fully under their control, [...] they have it outsourced kind of a bit.”

There were some believers in creating your own instance for several reasons. On a technical level, it would add nodes towards a more decentralised network, as one interviewee noted: “It also works to the advantage of the network because you have all of a sudden, what is it, 15 extra instances if it all works out.” Other advantages were the ease in decision-making, and distributions of responsibilities:

“From a governance point of view, it even helps, because then you are the owner of yourself”, and as a consequence “[y]ou don’t have to justify the decision taken on various occasions, with other institutions, with other users.”

Emphasising that the Fediverse is different to other existing platforms, others added:

‘[S]elf-hosting will help people have their own voice, have their own [...] moderation policy and be part of this world.”

During the pilot, the service model EDPS provided avoided major conflicts between the EUIs by interacting transparently and collaboratively a lot with involved institutions, and by not interfering with their communication strategies. However, some participants saw a long term cross-institutional service organised by a bigger EUI as problematic as it might overstep institutional boundaries:

“If the commission does it for itself. There’s one thing, but if the Commission starts doing it for the Council and the Council says ‘Wait a minute, you’re messing with my communication””

This was mainly seen as a control issue, and the solution would be to have their own instance, if EUIs do not want their official communications potentially be subject to

another EUI.

Some of the smaller institutions decided against setting up their own instance. From the documents collected through access requests, we learned that for some this was due to their limited following and outreach. But even institutions with a successful presence on the pilot decided against it: several smaller institutions simply didn't feel equipped to self-host.

Before the pilot officially ended, some participating institutions were considering or discussing the possibility of continuing a Fediverse presence. EFSA is the case we can follow most closely, since the documents we obtained include both an internal assessment and a report by GOPA, one of its social media service providers. The report suggested that a dedicated server could allow EFSA to explore new ways of sharing scientific information with greater control over distribution and community interaction, and raised the possibility of a joint account with other ENVI "sister agencies",¹⁰ working on the environment, public health and food safety. Internally, EFSA weighed this against the need for community management, the difficulty of removing hateful or misleading comments, and the absence of full-featured crossposting. Its own account's performance was modest, with slower growth and lower engagement than comparable EU accounts, though the report attributed this to the platform's nascent stage rather than to a lack of potential, and recommended staying. EFSA nonetheless decided against its own instance. At the time of writing it maintains a Bluesky account, reachable from the Fediverse only through a bridge.

One of the reasons the EU Voice and EU Video pilot went so smoothly was that EDPS followed a collaborative service model. They "did basically all the work and they onboarded lots of institutions. [...] They reached out to the communication department saying, we have this service. Do you want to join?" EDPS were the "owners of the headache", and while they communicated transparently with the other institutions involved, they centralised the responsibilities of the technical hosting, moderation, and governance. This decision is reasonable given that:

1. EDPS approached Fediverse integration as a long-term integration, in which other, bigger institutions with the right mandate and better suited structures would take it over with a service-model in mind. EDPS did not "[...] have the same possibility of the Council, the Parliament, or the Commission."
2. As a data protection agency, they could not fail. Failing would have meant that it would signal to the world, it cannot be done in a GDPR or otherwise legally compliant way. Hence centralising the different service aspects under their control was a way of testing. They, and other data protection agencies doing pilot projects,

¹⁰The ENVI agencies are five specialized European Union bodies (EEA, EMA, EFSA, ECHA, ECDC) that provide technical and scientific expertise to support EU environmental and public health policies. They collaborate closely with the European Parliament's ENVI Committee to ensure safety regulations are grounded in sound science.

spear-headed the move towards self-hosting options within public institutions.

Due to these factors, during the pilot phase there was a lack of capacity building for smaller institutions. They were not involved with the moderation, how to create governance or server rules, or what it means to self-host. EDPS helped similar initiatives, however, as they had multiple requests from non-EU public bodies to share documents such as the EU Voice and EU Video's terms and conditions and share experiences.

Overall, EDPS laid the groundwork for an EU-wide social media outreach based on the Fediverse. Their inter-institutional collaboration and their engagement with entities from the free and open source world created the conditions not only for a successful pilot, but for longer-term adoption and for steering the development of alternatives according to the needs of public institutions. And while there are other initiatives now continuing similar lines of work, this was a "missed opportunity."

3.3.1. Fediverse as a Way to Rethink the Role of Social Media for Public Institutions

Stepping up to the macro level, our participants resonated about the role of social media in public institutions, highlighting its importance and challenges for public communication. They emphasized that public communication is an essential part of their work, which is expected to remain or even increase in digital formats. This involves catering to diverse audiences, informing and reaching out to the general public as a means of fulfilling their obligation as public institutions. To achieve this goal, some of our participants emphasised public institutions need to be visible on various social media platforms. These platforms enable discussions, feedback, corrections, information sharing, and other interactions with their audience. Nonetheless, adopting new platforms can also add to the workload for these organizations, creating a major obstacle in terms of resources and capacity.

With big tech platforms dominating the market, the call to move away from private actors whose political and commercial interest shaping the experience on said platforms. Participants disliked how algorithms, and lately AI, are controlling content visibility. Another criticism was how increasing visibility is a core business practice of commercial platforms, albeit this has been questioned. Rather than being an enabler, interviewees saw commercial platforms as an obstacle for public communication, "it's limiting with this notion of public service or making information available to everyone." Anyone wanting to see information published by a public institution on these platforms, needs to have an account first. This vendor or platform lock-in, not only for public institutions, but also their audience was pointed out as an unfavourable effect, both from a privacy and digital rights perspective. As one interviewee puts it:

"[Public institutions] have an obligation to communicate to the citizens on a platform that is not forced upon the citizens and they don't have to accept terms of a particular provider of that platform."

It was also noted, much of the information on social media is not published elsewhere, reinforcing the importance of social media platforms for everyday public communication practices. The overall opinion of our participants was that the Fediverse fits the public mandate to information (posts are visible even without an account), while centralised, commercial social media does not.

Similarly, none of our participants was keen on having public institutions on platforms with extreme views, bots pushing unwanted content, nonetheless, a few voiced concerns in completely abandoning their audiences. Selecting different communication channels to serve a broad audience was a standard practice amongst public institutions we interviewed. Even EDPS aimed for their pilot to use these alternative platforms as add-ons rather than pushing for replacement of existing channels. Drawing from their experiences, our participants agreed that no one wants to be on a platform with harmful or divisive content. They believe in embracing diversity and enriching discussions by bringing different perspectives to various social platforms, and even saw themselves as enriching and encountering the debates there.

Big tech companies behind popular, commercial social media platforms have been criticized for being gate keepers, and that being “natural of centralized systems.” They are not interoperable, creating silos in which the network effect –aka having enough users on a platform to be of interest and creating traction for accounts– are hard to overcome. Some participants questioned why public institutions are still having an account on those platforms, which promote extreme or consumerist behaviour. It was further noted, that it seems free to use for public institutions as well, but “you give away your freedom for free service, but it’s free with a cost, another cost, which is a hidden cost.”

Regulation regarding interoperability would partly solve some of these issues, according to our participants. The Digital Markets Act (DMA) was highlighted as a way to enable more competition, and one way has been interoperability. The DMA introduced it within the EU for messaging services first, but there are plans for:

“mandating interoperability for the largest social networks so that then they would be obliged to provide interconnection, which would remove the network effects and which would make it possible that the social networks actually compete on the quality of the service.”

Furthermore, it externalises the responsibility to moderation into exploitative dependency over which users have little control or agency over apart from blocking single accounts. Not having influence on how these platforms operate remains a major disadvantage for continuing to use them, despite some legislation like the GDPR or the DMA trying to limit the amount of damage done by the large-scale violations and monopolization. Fines are one of the few mechanisms, but the lack of influence on decisions and ability to push for change is lacking from a legislative side.

The discussion around centralised, commercial social media was also characterised

with a general sentiment of “where to go next?” While the Fediverse is one alternative, other options such as Bluesky were mentioned. There were even predictions that a whole new type of social media will emerge. Public institutions moving away from big tech platforms were regarded as having a “role model” function, but participants also voiced frustration with how slow the transition is:

“You have to bring in people that are visible, MEPs, politicians. Where are they? They are saying bad things on X, but they say on X, I’m sorry, but eat your own dog food and follow your words.”

3.4. Discussion and Conclusion

We started our research with questions in mind about the integration of open-source alternatives in everyday operations of public administrations. What emerged from our analysis is that the real problem does not really lie in financing, data protection or technical issues, but it is mostly a matter of taking responsibility for the ecosystem of actors and the expectations that emerge from the different roles and interests each of them brings to the process.

The current situation for most public institutions is to be reliant on big tech. As our participants noted, freedom comes with a price. This price is the effort and labour put in to make alternatives work. In turn, being less reliant on outside actors gives them even additional agency to act. And that is being able to partake in decisions that affect the way how public institutions can conduct public communication and outreach.

The Core: A Shared Vision through Collective, Collaborative and Coordinated Actions

These elements –collective, collaborative and coordinated actions– are paramount for successful adoption of federated social media in public administrations. This holds true both for launching larger strategic initiatives, as well as for operational adoption. So, those coordinating the ecosystem need to focus on building good coordination skills and on being enabled to empower each of the joining actors. Within collaboration it is key that decision makers and stakeholders are on the same page. In short, this is about getting a broad alignment on shared, collective values and expectations. In order to build those shared expectations, it is important to make clear that the Fediverse and other alternative social media do not work like commercial platforms, so many “selling points” do not apply.

Starting from the need to really understand how to create an alignment and find a set of incentives (and use cases) for each one the groups involved. This is something the coordinators of the ecosystem should do. Identify clear assumptions held by the adopters so as to best tailor your common efforts to their needs and comprehension. Understand that some users might have problems integrating it in their current

workflow. By assessing needs and expectations first, you emphasize how adopting the Fediverse will work for and with them. Concretely, this coordination work touches every actor the initiative depends on, from social media managers who will run the instance day to day, to the technical and legal staff who keep it running and compliant, as well as engaging with developers and designers of ActivityPub and the Fediverse.

More Opportunities than Just Social Media

The EDPS pilot project, social.overheid.nl and many other initiatives have shown it is possible to successfully integrate Fediverse alternatives for public administrations and institutions. It requires ongoing collective, collaborative and coordinated actions. Integrating alternatives does not only include replacing or substituting existing social media platforms, but looking at what opportunities decentralised offer: A way to share (and receive) information with different actors.

While social media can be used for broadcasting, outreach and interaction, the underlying protocol ActivityPub and the social web are “another layer or level of [...] a standards-based internet.” With looking into these standards, public administrations can tailor their communication needs more effectively and (in)form their special interest groups. This theoretically applies to all public information that is published by public administrations. Using common standards and decentralisation to publish these holds the potential for interoperability between similar institutions and organisations as well as a long term sustainability for digitally shared public information that will scale well.

Further, these protocols not only enable connectivity, but also allow for strategic forms of disconnectivity[20] or “strategic closure”[72], both at the level of infrastructure, by reducing reliance on commercial big tech platforms, and at the level of daily moderation, through blocking or defederation options built into the ActivityPub protocol itself. Openness does have layers (see also our section on definitions). In turn, here are the fundamental questions public administrations have to ask themselves:

Where do you want to be open, and from what do you want the option to disconnect?

The same three dimensions we used to analyse the pilot, are helpful for future initiatives as starting points. Rather than describing what EU Voice and EU Video were, they set out the questions any public administration considering the same path will have to answer at each level:

1. The micro level concerns the individual institution and its information. This means asking: where and how is information already being shared and made transparent? Which transparency mandates for public data does the institution already have to follow, and through what channels (portals, databases, websites, social media

platforms, among others)? What standards are currently in use, if any, and could ActivityPub be added to share this information?

2. The meso level concerns relationships between institutions. Here, this means asking: who do we want to connect to, and who not to? Under what circumstances are we connecting, and what rules or conventions govern this? Who can change these rules, and how? Where is coordination needed, and where is direct connection possible and desired?
3. The macro level concerns the wider ecosystem. Here, the question becomes where control should sit and where coordination is instead required, given that openness at this scale means relying on other actors rather than acting alone.

Open source alternatives in public administrations require a large set of actors to set priorities and policies, collaborate, and create governance structures. This is a radical shift, and starting with social media alternatives is one way to facilitate a broader change. Now the task becomes closer to creating a strong, shared vision for and by the people who are using it. However, this is not a trivial task. As awareness, attention and shared understanding of all actors involved are the key prerequisite, having social media online alternatives requires ongoing collective, collaborative and coordinated actions. Building up the capacity to do so and the ability to continuously adapt will take some time.

Whether that capacity gets built depends on political choices about what kind of digital infrastructure Europe invests in, on how moderation is governed across a shared space, and on whether the software and communities underneath it all are funded at all. The next chapter takes up these conditions.



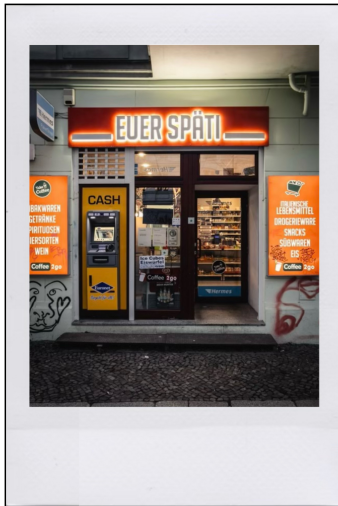
—WARNING: The FediVotary Logbook—
This logbook features stories with genuine quotes from actual people about real events, all collected during our research on Fediverse integration with Public-Access-Internet. Opinions are personal, organizations and quoted individuals are not responsible for any harm from using this material. See, along the period! Unless you can be a person. Then, along the person.



Februari, 2025

The Challenge of Visibility

Looking for George Clooney



Under the room's warm light a debate began, voices smooth and eyes bright. "I support the goal," one person said, smiling like a dare. "We want a digital Eden—Mastodon and similar platforms—but visibility brings real risks."

They swirled their wine. "And yes, the Commission joined Mastodon. Did it help?" they asked, skepticism in their laugh.

"The real job," they said, "is getting celebrities, sports stars, and local governments to adopt decentralised platforms. Are you bold enough to win them over? —Where's George Clooney?"

Frustration flared. "How can critics of X still use the same platform they criticise? Politicians, check your words!" Their passion filled the room.

Still, there was hope. "If we want change, leaders must act on their promises," they said softly, leaving the idea hanging. The path to digital fairness needs more than talk. Do we dare follow it?

Billie

Discussion & Lessons Learned

By Daniele Turra

The previous chapter traced what happened: how the EU Voice and EU Video instances came about, how they were run, and what remained once they closed. It ended with questions rather than answers, which is where this chapter starts. Rather than adding evidence, it argues from the evidence already gathered, working through four conditions that would make initiatives like the pilot viable rather than exceptional: the political stakes of choosing a distributed model over a centralised one, the question of who governs moderation in a shared space, the coordination that participation demands, and the funding that sustains the software and communities underneath it.

4.1. Political Dimensions in Using the Fediverse for Public Communication

To understand what the Fediverse might offer for public communication, it helps to trace how public institutions have communicated with citizens across three distinct paradigms across recent history.

In the first paradigm of traditional media, editorial intermediation was the structuring principle. Press offices produced statements that journalists from public or private broadcasters turned into editorial products. The filter was both a quality mechanism and a potential instrument of control. In some national contexts this produced a plurality of voices; in others, a handful of outlets with near-identical editorial lines served effectively as state mouthpieces. Still nowadays, across Europe (e.g. in Italy with the RAI model, or in Germany with ARD model, or in the UK with BBC) we experience these institutionalised forms of mediated public communication, with their own accountability structures and their own blind spots.

The second paradigm of centralised commercial social media, removed one layer of intermediation, but replaced it with another. For example, a municipal administrator can publish directly on Twitter, bypassing national broadcasters and editorial gatekeepers. This directness has genuine value, as citizens receive information from an officially identified source, without the delay or reframing introduced by a third party. But the platform itself becomes an opaque intermediary of a different kind. Moderation,

algorithmic ranking, and ultimately access are all subject to private decisions, decisions that, as the trajectory of X following its acquisition by Elon Musk illustrates, can shift rapidly and unilaterally. The only recourse available to any actor on such a platform, including a public institution, is to leave.

The third paradigm introduced by the Fediverse brings something structurally different. Institutions can again communicate directly with citizens. But for the first time, the platform's operating logic, its algorithms, its moderation rules, and its governance, is transparent, modifiable, and potentially governed in a pluralistic way. What this means in practice, the mechanics of defederation, blocklisting, and federation policy, is taken up in the next section and, in operational detail, in chapter 5.

The point here is a more basic one: the governance of a Fediverse instance is not a private matter delegated to a platform's terms of service. It is a public one, and so it can be organised as such.

This is genuinely new. The traditional public broadcaster model positions the institution as the source of content, mediated by a specialised entity. The centralised commercial social media model positions it as a content producer on infrastructure it does not control and cannot influence. The Fediverse makes it possible, for the first time, for a public institution to participate in shaping the space of communication, not merely occupy it. An institution that says "these are our moderation criteria, and this community has helped define them," transparently, through an open process, is doing something categorically different from anything that preceded it. Whether this potential is realised depends on operational preconditions that the EU Voice and EU Video experience makes very concrete.

This is not, however, the direction in which current EU institutional investment is moving. As of June 2026, the European Commission's public endorsement of platforms such as Bluesky and W-Social, the latter launched at Davos and venture-capital backed, points toward a different model: a centralised European asset, controllable and fundable as a single entity, rather than a distributed ecosystem. The logic is understandable from an institutional management perspective. In terms of digital sovereignty, it is easier to direct resources toward one or two large actors than to sustain a fragmented ecosystem of smaller contributors. But it answers the questions raised in chapter 3 on digital sovereignty by Clusters 3 and 4 of our research, regulation and strategic asset control, while leaving behind Clusters 1 and 2, autonomy and value-based choice. Whether that trade-off is acceptable depends on what one thinks public digital infrastructure is actually for.

4.2. Moderation of Shared Digital Spaces

Public institutions can (and should) run their own instances, much as they run public broadcasting. They must do so with transparent policies and limited scope, to avoid authoritarian drift. The concern is worth taking seriously, but it is also worth examining

carefully. The argument that state presence on social media inevitably produces authoritarian drift assumes that the alternative, reliance on commercial platforms or on traditional public broadcasting, is somehow more neutral.

Traditional media can serve as state mouthpieces in ways that are less visible precisely because the intermediation layer obscures the relationship. In some national contexts, a dozen privately owned outlets with near-identical editorial lines are a more effective instrument of state communication than any direct institutional account could be. The real risk is not institutional presence on social platforms but the elimination of alternative information sources. A public institution on Mastodon alongside a thriving plurality of independent instances is a categorically different situation from one in which that institution's instance is the only game in town. Transparent policies and limited scope matter, but so does the broader media ecology in which any given instance operates.

In the case of public broadcasting, a broadcaster (like the Italian RAI, the German ARD or the British BBC) is a specialised intermediary that receives institutional communication and repackages it for public consumption. Public outlets also exist to serve the public interest so long as they operate under clear mandates and public scrutiny.

A public institution running its own Fediverse instance is doing something different. It is holding the megaphone directly. The accountability question shifts accordingly, as it is no longer about editorial independence from the state, but about the transparency of the rules governing the space the state itself is operating. In this sense, multistakeholder-engagement, community and non-state moderation remain crucial to protect democratic pluralism and foster digital commons. This problem of coordination makes a question arise: does it mean that the only solution to scattered responsibility is an overarching supervisory entity for the entire network? Not necessarily.

What really matters is to clearly define moderation and federation policies that can be used to interact with other instances. How those policies can concretely be built is addressed operationally in Chapter 5.

4.3. Building the Ecosystem through Coordination

Both of the questions raised so far, what a distributed ecosystem is actually for, and who governs moderation within it, come down to the same thing in the end: what a public institution actually does once it chooses to control its own communication space instead of relying on someone else's. Because participating is not a one-off decision made at the top, but an ongoing act, it has some costs. Someone has to bring together, and keep together, the full set of actors whose buy-in that participation depends on.

That is a larger undertaking than picking Mastodon over Twitter or PeerTube over YouTube. This is a decision about what kind of communication infrastructure a public institution wants to be responsible for, and about who else it is willing to make respon-

sible alongside it. What that means for each of them, in practice, is also explored in chapter 5.

4.4. Sustainable Funding for Public Interest infrastructure and Open Source Development

Our digital societies are dependent on free and open source software. European communities of developers, hackers, tinkerers, and professionals maintain commercial and FOSS software based on community efforts. Still, funding is not distributed fairly enough to reduce the impact of “adversarial dependencies.” The current model of prototype and project-based disenfranchises and exploits developers, which are stuck with caring and maintaining the infrastructure others are using. A long-term vision is urgently needed.

If we do not fund FOSS behind public impact technologies, those might just die out, while society is still utterly dependent on them. If we want to avoid this we must think about funding differently. In a way, funding can be seen as a way of allowing certain discourses and values to thrive or not. That is why it is crucial to understand the role of public institutions in this.

Creating funding for these types of communities enables the possibility for institutions to have better knowledge on certain topics, just as NGI allowed. In that case, SocialHub organised workshops to inform civil servants on FOSS technologies and their societal role. Without SocialHub and the little funding that went behind it, we would not have the conditions that allowed for EU Voice and EU Video to flourish. The same logic applies to the moderation layer, as community-maintained blocklists, federation governance tools, and the expertise needed to run them do not sustain themselves.

If public institutions relied on resources produced by the open source community, they would have a corresponding interest in ensuring they remain viable. So, there might not be one way of funding open source, but it is worth discussing possible pathways such as procurement, dedicated long-term funding programmes, or licence fees similar to public broadcasts. What it cannot be is an assumption that the open source community will simply absorb the cost.



—WARNING: The Fediverse Logbook—
This logbook features stories with genuine quotes from actual people about real events, all collected during our research on Fediverse integration with Public Administration. Opinions are personal, organizations and quoted individuals are not responsible for any harm from using this material. So, always be careful! Unless you can be a pirate, then always be a pirate.



December, 2024

Sweating SysAdmins

Rocket Science Responsibility



In a dim room buzzing with static, our fixer leaned in and asked: What if public institutions join the Fediverse?

The interviewee smiled. “Responsibility. They must own it. They hold the keys to their data’s secrets.”

“Imagine your space agency runs a Mastodon node. Rocket science isn’t a helpdesk ticket —experts must speak for their work.” They laughed. “You can’t dump moderation on a tired sysadmin.”

“Think 100K users, each with a server: Every community becomes its own governance stage —moderation as choreography, ownership as ritual, trust as currency.”

The talk ended fast. They were right. Indeed, the Fediverse feels electric and risky at the same time. If institutions join in, accountability won’t be dry policy: it will be an intense power play.

Billie

Recommendations for Public Institutions

By Daniele Turra

Unsure where to start with the Fediverse? Don't worry, we have you covered. The previous two chapters looked at what one pilot revealed and at the conditions that would make initiatives like it last. In this chapter, we will walk you through the process of getting started with the Fediverse and provide recommendations from our participants who have successfully navigated this journey. You can have a look at arguments for Fediverse integration and the challenges here to get an overview of what are good reasons to start, and what else to consider. Also, in the case you consider remaining and potentially scaling up, you will find additional recommendations on how to structure ownership and delivery so the initiative survives beyond a pilot.

5.1. Can I just Create an Account?

First, let's discuss the different pathways into the Fediverse. There are various ways to join the Fediverse, but creating your own instance or self-hosting is not necessarily the only option. You can start by simply creating an account on an existing instance of Mastodon or any other Fediverse platform. This way, you can begin engaging with the community right away without having to go through the process of setting up your own server.

Pros of starting with an existing instance include:

1. You can start immediately
2. You don't have to worry about server infrastructure or set-up
3. You can (relatively) easily find and connect with communities that share your interests

However, there are some things to consider when choosing which instance to join or which application to use for microblogging. It is important to think about the community you would like to be connected with and choose an instance that aligns with those interests. This will make it easier for you to engage with like-minded individuals on Mastodon or other Fediverse platforms.

One of the first challenges you may face when joining the Fediverse is finding the right instance to create your account on. Our participants suggest taking some time to think about this decision and not just randomly choosing an instance. By doing so, you can find a community that resonates with your interests or goals and make it easier for you to connect with others who share those passions.

To get started, consider looking at resources available and finding instances that have users you already know or communities that align with your interests. This will help you build connections within the Fediverse more easily and ensure a smoother transition into this new platform.

Before choosing where, it is worth being clear about who is joining. An institutional account and a personal account held by someone working for a public body are different things, and the criteria for choosing an instance differ accordingly. Both are legitimate routes, and some institutions have used them in combination.

For an institutional account, the choice of instance is a governance decision as much as a communication one. The relevant questions are who operates the instance and under what legal jurisdiction, what its moderation and federation policies are, how stable its funding and administration appear, and whether hosting an official account there is compatible with your own mandate and communication rules. It is also worth looking at which other public bodies are already present: their experience is useful, and a shared presence among institutions is more legible to citizens looking for official sources. Bear in mind that an account on someone else's instance means depending on decisions you do not control, including the possibility that the instance closes or changes its rules.

For staff joining in a personal capacity, the considerations are closer to those of any individual user. We suggest finding an instance whose community and rules fit what you want to do there. The one addition is transparency about affiliation. Making it explicit that you work for a public institution, while posting in your own voice, is what makes this route valuable. This was in fact the approach DG COMM recommended to the IOCC in February 2021, before the institutions participating in the EU Voice and EU Video pilot took the institutional-account route instead. Whichever route you take, our participants suggest not treating the choice of instance as a formality. Taking time over it makes everything that follows easier.

5.2. Delivery Models, Ownership and Responsibilities for Fediverse Instances in Public Institutions

Being on the Fediverse is a decision that translates in infrastructure, maintenance, moderation, data governance, and sustained staff attention. The EU Voice and EU Video pilot project showed that in the early experimental phase, a single small team can absorb all of this informally: costs stay contained, responsibilities are shared tacitly,

and the initiative moves forward on enthusiasm and proximity. While that arrangement might work for a fixed-term experiment, it becomes easily vulnerable to changing priorities. The earlier an institution asks the governance questions, the less disruptive the answers will be in the long run.

The most important of those questions is simply:

Who really should own this?

Ownership spans at least three distinct organisational responsibilities that must be assigned before a project moves beyond the experimental stage:

1. The **strategic owner** holds the long-term rationale on why the service should exist, how it connects to institutional goals, and whether it remains worth sustaining as those goals evolve. This could be an ad-hoc committee, an already existing department in your organisation, or a key decision-maker. As a non-delegable function, the strategic owner is responsible for analysing what organisational or societal need the service would address, identifying the target users and their expectations, clarifying how the service aligns with longer-term institutional goals around public values, drafting the policies and principles that will guide service design and moderation, and monitoring whether the service continues to serve its intended purpose as conditions change.
2. The **operational owner** manages the daily reality of running a platform/service, keeping it technically current, coordinating moderation, and ensuring users are supported. Given the range of activities involved, operational ownership is more likely a set of responsibilities distributed across teams or units, each accountable for a specific area.
3. The **compliance owner** signs off on data protection obligations, manages liability, and ensures the service meets regulatory requirements.

5.2.1. Choosing a Delivery Model

These three ownership roles remain relevant regardless how an institution decides to deliver its Fediverse service to users. What changes is the distribution of responsibilities across those roles, and how much of the operational layer the institution manages directly. Institutions broadly have three options:

1. **Self-hosting (insourced):** means building and running your own instance with full internal control over infrastructure, moderation, and data. This model also concentrates all operational responsibilities internally. It is viable when the institution has the technical capacity to sustain it, and when that capacity is explicitly resourced rather than informally absorbed by whoever launched the pilot.
2. **Managed service (fully outsourced):** The institution delegates operational exe-

cution to an external provider, whether commercial, community-run, or another public administration offering shared infrastructure to peer institutions. The provider manages servers, maintenance, security patches, and often moderation policy. The institution retains strategic direction and legal accountability, but outsources the "how" of day-to-day operation. Particularly when the external provider is a trusted partner with aligned values, this model can serve an institution's mission just as effectively as self-hosting, but at a fraction of the operational cost.

3. **Hybrid or shared service models:** Hybrid or shared service models combine internal and external elements, managing some activities in-house while delegating others. This is often a pragmatic path for larger institutions or for those building internal capacity progressively, and it can enable economies of scale when infrastructure or moderation responsibilities are shared across departments or agencies. However, it introduces coordination complexity and requires especially clear delineation of who owns what.

The choice between these models is primarily a question of internal capacity, existing procurement policies, and current policy objectives. Regardless of which model an institution chooses:

- clearly identify which delivery model fits your current capacity before committing to an architecture
- ensure that strategic, operational, and legal ownerships are explicitly assigned
- where external providers are involved, establish from the outset which responsibilities remain internal and which are contractually delegated (and to whom).

5.2.2. Operating Your Own Instance (or a Hybrid) –Cheap and Easy. Kinda.

Once an institution moves past the account-on-an-existing-instance stage and starts considering running its own, a different set of questions opens up. There are certain elements to think about when operating your own instance. It might seem like a lot at first, but very consistently our participants emphasised how easy it actually is. Well, mostly.

More in particular, for institutions that self-host or adopt a hybrid model, four areas in particular require explicit ownership and, in each case, the right internal alliances to foster good collaboration:

1. **Hosting, development and customisation** is the starting point for strategic alignment with operations. It involves designing and developing practical features and characteristics to adapt the service to users and needs, so to fulfil the public service policies and goals set at the strategic level, as well as giving back code to the open source community. This activity requires input from service designers, policy leads, and user-facing teams, not just technical staff.

2. **Infrastructure, security, and service management** –covering server hosting, scaling, uptime, security patching, and user support– will in most large organisations map onto an existing IT department or unit. Rather than treating this as a new problem, map it onto whatever governance structures already exist. Infrastructure teams often have strong opinions about how services should be run, and sometimes genuine enthusiasm for open-source, self-hosted alternatives. Finding them early and framing the initiative in terms of their existing priorities can turn a bureaucratic obstacle into an internal champion.
3. **Content moderation and community management** sits at the intersection of technical operations and institutional values, and it is the area most likely to be underestimated at the outset. Who moderates depends heavily on who the users are and what policies already govern institutional communications. Legal teams, communications offices, and platform administrators all have a legitimate stake here. The key is not to prescribe a single model, but to ensure that moderation standards and responsibilities are defined, evolve over time, and agreed across relevant parties before users arrive.
4. **Data privacy and compliance activities** should involve your institution’s Data Protection Officer from the beginning, not as a final checkpoint. A self-hosted or carefully selected external platform can represent exactly the kind of sovereignty-respecting, GDPR-aligned infrastructure that DPOs have reason to support. Engaging them early can reframe the conversation entirely: rather than seeking approval for a risk, you may find a natural ally who helps make the case for the initiative internally.

The same logic applies across all four areas –for each activity, identify who in your institution already cares about this problem, and find the right ally before you need their sign-off. You can find an overview in table 5.1 for easier understanding.

Table 5.1: Overview of Delivery Models

	Self Hosted	Hybrid or Shared Service Models	Managed Service
Service and Strategy Definition	Strategic owner. Internal capacity required regardless of delivery model.	Strategic owner. Internal capacity required regardless of delivery model.	Strategic owner. Internal capacity required regardless of delivery model.
Platform Development and Customisation	Internal team, with input from service designers, policy leads, and user-facing staff.	Split between internal teams and external provider per contract scope. Strategic owner defines requirements; provider executes.	Delegated to provider. Institution defines requirements and retains policy input; provider builds and maintains.
Infrastructure, Hosting, Security, Support	Internal IT department or unit. Map onto existing governance structures; find champions early.	Core infrastructure may be outsourced; security oversight and service management may remain internal.	Fully delegated to provider. Institution monitors SLAs and retains accountability for service continuity.
Content Moderation and Community Management	Internal. Legal, communications, and platform administrators all have a stake. Define standards before launch.	Shared between institution and provider. Policy ownership stays internal; enforcement may be delegated.	Provider manages enforcement. Institution must still own and define moderation policy.
Data Privacy and Compliance	Internal Legal/compliance owner. DPO is a key ally from the outset, not a final checkpoint.	Shared accountability. DPO must be involved regardless of what is outsourced.	Provider handles technical compliance. Legal accountability remains with the institution.

5.2.3. Before A Pilot Ends: A Few Questions on Building Sustainable Internal Governance

Many public institutions have pilots running. And potentially ending. Here we want to give a few questions regarding how to build a sustainable governance.

1. On strategic ownership:

- Who in the institution should be clearly accountable for why this service exists and whether it should continue?
- Is that owner (or ownership committee) formally designated and resourced?
- Does the strategic owner have enough visibility into operations to know whether the service is meeting its intended purpose?

2. On operational ownership:

- For each of the four operational domains, who is explicitly responsible?
- Do those individuals or teams have the capacity and authority to own their domain?
- If responsibilities are split across departments, are escalation paths and decision-making processes defined?

3. On legal and compliance ownership:

- Is the Data Protection Officer engaged as an early stakeholder, not a final approver?
- Are there explicit contracts or service-level agreements if any operations are outsourced?
- Does the institution understand its legal liability under different delivery models?

4. On delivery model sustainability:

- If the pilot is self-hosted, does the institution have the long-term technical capacity to maintain it?
- If outsourced, does the external provider's governance and values align with the institution's?

- If hybrid, are responsibilities clearly divided and regularly reviewed?

5. On transition to permanence:

- What would it take to move from pilot to permanent service?
- Who would be accountable for making that transition decision?
- Is there a fixed timeline for deciding, rather than leaving the question open-ended?

5.3. Cross-Cutting Considerations, Whatever Model You Choose

Regardless of which delivery model an institution chooses, self-hosted, managed, or hybrid, a set of considerations applies across the board. The following three areas are not tied to any single model; they need to be addressed whichever path an institution takes.

5.3.1. People: Social Media Managers and Capacity Building

Who is going to use it in their daily (work) life? Social media managers! The Fediverse and whatever you might adopt (e.g. Mastodon, Peertube) might not have all the tools a social media manager is used to. Identifying missing features and improved integration of existing solutions is one important consideration. This can and should extend to co-develop with social media managers to adopt and tailor it to their needs.

Care About Your Social Media Managers & Comms People!

Social media managers are used to analyse which types of posts perform best (even with low engagement) and tailor content accordingly. Metrics are not always possible, then consider qualitative data collection, such as conducting a small survey or directly reaching out to followers to understand their interests and expectations. Polls on Mastodon work particularly well for this!

In practice

- Involve the people who will run the account before choosing the platform.
- Budget the time, not just the money. Our participants consistently described the real cost as staff attention rather than infrastructure.

- Do not assume prior familiarity. Several institutions in the pilot joined without anyone on the team having used the Fediverse before. So make sure to plan for a learning period accordingly, and for questions that will seem basic.
- Set expectations about what success looks like early. Follower counts on the Fediverse will not resemble those on commercial platforms, and an initiative judged by the wrong metric tends to be defunded before it matures.

Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building for Communities of Users and Admins

The Fediverse is a collective effort, and continued capacity building among the actors and stakeholders involved is key to long-term success and resilience.

How you organise this depends on your delivery model and on the scale you are operating at. In the early stages, a single person taking care of the cross-cutting questions may be enough. As the network grows, that role tends to formalise, whether into a board handling moderation decisions or into a cross-functional centre of expertise. Whichever form it takes, someone needs to hold the coordination function rather than leaving it to fall between teams.

This coordination work is broad by nature. Community coordinators have to engage with Data Protection Officers across the organisations involved, with social media managers, with IT officers, and with whoever else the initiative depends on. Their job is less about running any one of these functions than about keeping them talking to each other.

5.3.2. Moderation: Building Concrete Federation Policies

Chapter 4 raised the question of whether scattered moderation responsibility across many instances requires an overarching supervisory entity for the whole network. It does not. What it requires is that moderation and federation policies be defined clearly enough that institutions can interact with other instances on known terms.

A solid example of principles to take into consideration is given by the work of Kissane and Kazemi [35]:

- **Defederation/block criteria:** criteria should be explicit and published, because (de)federation is effectively the main cross-instance lever. Typical triggers include: persistent hosting of unlawful or violence-inciting content; chronic spam or technical misconduct that degrades service; systemic under-moderation by a remote operator; and hostile community norms that predictably spill over as harassment. Publishing concrete criteria reduces ambiguity for members and administrators and sets expectations for counterpart instances.
- **Allowlisting/whitelisting** where helpful: allowlisting narrows the responsibility surface by intentionally limiting federation to a known set of instances. In early

phases, starting with vetted public-sector servers or operators that pass a light due-diligence on moderation, security posture, and basic legal compliance reduces moderation load and transfer risk. This would mean basically creating an alternative social network of e.g. only local administrations. Sharing and updating these lists is another part that can and should be coordinated.

It means there are two coordination models:

1. Formal relationships such as contracts or MoUs between operators to connect instances: safer, slower; appropriate when purposes, tools and mandates are shared.
2. Open federation (no bilateral agreements): faster and more generative, but needs clear block/limit criteria and stronger monitoring capacity. Kissane and Kazemi [35] described this “federated diplomacy” layer as crucial yet under-documented.

Which model will be best suited for public institutions depends on their own structure and scope. From a legal side, it is most likely that each instance will be responsible for what happens on their instance.¹ However, if the network grows so will the challenges that come with moderation. Building capacity within and across will help to deal with issues we see on commercial social media today: bots, hate speech and potentially sharing illegal content.

Building and maintaining these capacities and blocklists over time is a resourcing problem [21, 22], and one that chapter 4 situates in the broader question of how open source infrastructure serving the public interest gets funded.

In practice

- Publish your moderation and federation criteria before you need them. If you rely on shared blocklists or community-maintained tools, identify who maintains them and include them in the discussion.
- Decide in advance who can trigger a defederation and who signs it off. In the pilot this sat with the instance operator, but the institutions affected by the decision were not always the ones making it.
- Distinguish between what an account holder can do for itself (blocking, muting) and what requires instance-level action. Making this explicit to participating bodies reduces the volume of requests that reach the operator.
- Plan for moderation load to scale with visibility of your accounts.

¹A full analysis on these aspects has been done by Rebecca Sieber (in German): <https://stiftungdatenschutz.org/praxisthemen/datenschutz-bei-mastodon>

5.3.3. GDPR? You're Probably Fine –Mostly

Just like the EU Voice and EU Video pilot project, many of the early experimentations of government agencies and public bodies experimenting with the Fediverse began with Data Protection authorities (as in the case of social.bund.de). This is for a good reason, while you can say the Fediverse complies with the GDPR and privacy values, this is only true if the operators of this instance care for these values. Just like in commercial social media, your admins can read all your messages –if they wanted to. They also hold your data that you signed up with, most likely an email address. So you have to come up with terms and conditions, set up procedures for data deletion and acceptable retention.

To actually implement these values in practice you have to think through questions like:

In a decentralised network, if I post a picture on my instance that gets shared by 50 other instances and it has to get taken down for legal reasons, how is responsible for taking it down?

Now anyone who has been on the internet for a while knows that just because you take down an image from a platform does not mean it still can't be circulated.

One of the good things about all these data protection agencies going through this early experimentation has answered the question: Can it be done in a privacy-preserving and legally sound data protection way? And the answer is yes, it can. There are some areas that are still debated amongst scholars and legal experts. But these are details to be hammered out in the future and should not keep anyone from experimenting further! The key takeaway is that there is a wealth of resources and experts now that can give you advice on these topics if needed!

In practice

- Bring the DPO in early, at the design stage, and settle controllership early. During the EU Voice and EU Video pilot, institutions and the EDPS opted for joint controllership between the operator and participating account holders, with the operator (EDPS) acting as processor for hosting and technical administration.
- Write terms of service and a privacy notice before opening accounts, and be explicit about who may hold an account.
- Define retention and deletion procedures, including what happens to content that has already federated to other instances.
- Reuse what already exists. Public bodies running instances have published terms, privacy notices and governance documents.²

²One initiative to collect documents such as terms & Services is the Open Terms Archive.



—WARNING: The FedVottery Logbook—
This logbook features stories with genuine quotes from actual people about real events, all collected during our research on FedVottery's integration with Public Administration. Opinions are personal, organizations and quoted individuals are not responsible for any harm from using this material. So, along for the ride! Unless you can be a pirate. Then, along for a prize.



November, 2025

Steering A Ship in A Wired Ocean

Head of Your Own Headache



We were under soft lights in a buzzing lounge when “digital sovereignty” drifted through the room like perfume. At the bar, someone charming pulled me into a private talk.

“Is it true? Is it real independence?” I asked.

They smiled. “Yes —but independence isn’t one thing. It means taking control away from those who hold it too tightly.”

“Open source is the tool,” they said. “It lets you steer your own ship.” They talked about Mastodon like a lover: Forks, instances, and personal autonomy —each idea a small promise.

“You’re both builder and activist,” they whispered. “Same protocol, your own pace. You get freedom —and the headaches that come with it.”

The conversation felt part manifesto, part seduction: freedom and connection braided together until desire and change blurred.

Billie

Our Message to Digital Activists and Campaigners

By FediVariety

We recognise advocacy efforts within the Fediverse space take many shapes and come from many directions, and every campaign starts from a different place. There are a few good things and a few tougher things to focus on here, and we want to be upfront about both. We want to inspire you to act, and to help you figure out how our findings might fit into your current and future campaigns.

There are some advantages and challenges we have identified in this report when it comes to broader adoption of the Fediverse in public institutions. Here we want to bring up some of the challenges as an open and honest discussion of the value and current limitations of the Fediverse with an appeal to fellow FOSS and digital activist communities.

This chapter is not meant to be one more restatement of the arguments this community already knows by heart. Preaching to the choir doesn't move the needle. Our goal here is to help build a better framing for advocacy that goes beyond the limits of the narratives currently in circulation. That means naming honestly where those narratives fall short, and surfacing arguments that are genuinely new, concrete, and grounded in what we actually found through interviews, document analysis, and conversations across the community.

First we name some of the friction points, then we offer arguments to advocate for the Fediverse, and lastly we point to some possible future directions.

6.1. Friction Points to Work Around

6.1.1. Low Awareness?

"I think all challenges and problems are solvable here. I don't really think that there is a major obstacle that should be a show stopper for this."

At the root of most friction points sits the same underlying problem: awareness about

alternatives. Some of our participants were unsure whether there is broad interest in Fediverse integration at all. Some even said that they don't "feel the push" for the Fediverse. In practice, most civil servants we encountered in corridors, at parties and events, outside the small group who had already tried it had not heard of the Fediverse at all.

Part of the problem is what people associate with the Fediverse. In everyday language, even among activists who don't come from a long history of participation in Fediverse communities, "Fediverse" and "Mastodon" tend to get used as synonyms. While most of the time (including this very report) discussions on it often come down to Mastodon (AKA the big fish in a small pond!), the Fediverse is so much more than that.

Moreover, in some policy and digital activist circles, there's an instinct to use the current momentum around digital sovereignty as an angle to push for Fediverse integration. We recognize it could be a real driver, but (as discussed in Chapter 3) digital sovereignty is itself a contested, polysemic notion rather than a single argument, and not everyone in our interviews was convinced by it.

On the other hand, the sheer size and diversity of the Fediverse as a network is also a genuine strength, with different communities, very different solutions for very different problems, all held together by a single shared protocol. But presented on its own, that breadth can be daunting and be easily read as fragmentation.

So, what now? Too narrow (only Mastodon) undersells it, too narrow again (leveraging digital sovereignty) does not land either, and too broad (the whole ecosystem at once) can overwhelm.

6.1.2. Data Protection Is Not An Issue, But It Is Not the Main Selling Point Either

Let's face it. Within our communities, we value privacy and data protection. And while everybody knows that many of the platforms and the companies behind them are bad, they continue to use them. Out of convenience, out of lock-in, due to the network effect. Privacy and Data Protection is a nice add-on, but not a main reason for many to switch. Unfortunately. Some people will find those lines of argument compelling, and for them it is important to emphasise the right points.

For any Data Protection Officer, it will be good to know that there are Terms and Conditions out there that have been developed by EDPS. And the many other Data Protection Authorities who spearheaded experimenting and piloting with Fediverse integration. For others, arguments need to be better embedded in their own world. Communication and social media managers, for example, respond better to the fun factor and a more targeted audience. Also, the idea of adopting style changes, e.g. for colour and branding, is effective too.

6.1.3. Recommendation: The Right Framing Fixes (Almost) Everything (Just Ask)

Don't rely on a single framing (be it privacy, sovereignty, network size, or whatever) to carry the whole argument on its own. Combine multiple angles suited to different audiences, and treat awareness-building as a long-term, multi-front campaign rather than a single pitch.

Most importantly, start from the actual need behind the specific person or organisation in front of you, rather than leading with a technical selling point like the existence of a shared protocol: what convinces one audience (an EU institution weighing digital sovereignty) will do nothing for another (a communications manager who just wants an engaged audience).

Making and showcasing the value that it brings, will be a continuous effort that will have to come from many sides. Existing initiatives like the +1 principle are a good start. We have also learned that resistance is everywhere ;)

One of the more surprising findings was how easy it is to start collaborations and spark curiosity by just asking. To overcome these challenges, our recommendation would be to ask your local municipality, library, etc why they do not have it. Challenge their social media strategy (gently). It might not all lead to an immediate switch, but it might get a ball rolling.

6.2. New Arguments Worth Making

"I think it's not too much about overcoming the challenges or challenging the arguments that are against but it's more about realising what all the benefits are."

Just to be clear: Many arguments (such as moving away from big tech for privacy reasons) are valid, but they do not cancel out the friction points we discussed earlier. If you present as if the Fediverse has no downsides, you will lose credibility with anyone who's actually tried it and hit the usability or community gaps we described.

What follows are just new angles worth adding to your toolkit. Interoperability is a work in progress, and that's fine. Yes, some more obscure applications don't talk to each other perfectly yet. Trying different combination mechanisms might expose some gaps in how content renders across projects. But this is an implementation problem, not a structural one. These kinds of problems get ironed out over time as single, young projects mature and converge on shared conventions. ActivityPub still resists at the very core of the Fediverse, and it is still capable of powering many known and future applications. So, frame it as exactly that to your audiences: an ecosystem actively getting better at talking to itself, not a broken promise.

Low barriers to entry, powered by that same interoperability, open the door to a much

wider range of people who can build and fund alternatives. This is where the Fediverse’s real strength lies, and it is worth being tactically honest about where it doesn’t: if you compare Mastodon to X/Twitter user-for-user (maybe even with some very “convenient” metrics as user base or money behind development) you often lose that argument.

Stop making that comparison; it is a losing frame. The Fediverse wins on a different playing field entirely: it can be built and paid for by public institutions, NGOs, professional associations, individual developers, or even small companies. Instead of just corporate, shareholder-driven platforms chasing ad revenue, now we can welcome an entire galaxy of actors who previously had no way to participate in building alternatives.

Public funding programmes already exist to support exactly this. NLnet, NGI, and Fediversity, among others, are already funding Fediverse-related development today. So, make sure to point potential partners toward them as a concrete, actionable step. This will increase the odds of seeing new funding cycles over the next few years.

On resilience and moderation, in short: the Fediverse’s distributed structure means a single compromised or badly-run server doesn’t take down the whole network the way a breach or bad decision at a centralised platform can. The same distributed structure also makes community-based moderation possible (as explained in chapter 5, that is possible thanks to admins maintaining blocklists over time, defederating from problematic instances, building a track record of how a given server is run, and so on).

6.3. Be Aware Of All The Tools Available To Campaigners!

As activists, we should not forget that the EU already runs a range of legislative and budgetary mechanisms that can open a door into institutional dynamics. We suggest keeping an eye on all of them.

One of the examples we know of are EU Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions. Defined under the EU’s Financial Regulation, they let Parliament put money in the budget to test a new policy direction even before a detailed legal basis exists. This is one of the few instruments where campaigners can work with MEPs to put a new idea on the table and attach a budget line to it, without waiting for the Commission to legislate first. FOSSEPS¹, a 2021 Pilot Project on free and open-source software in public services that was upgraded in 2024 to a Preparatory Action, shows this path from small experiment to structured EU initiative is a real one.

But this is just one entry point among others we haven’t mapped here –citizens’ initiatives, petitions, consultations, and other legislative or budgetary levers can each open their own kind of window.

The broader point stands regardless of which specific mechanism ends up being useful: be aware that these tools exist, learn the ones relevant to your context, and treat them

¹for more information, please visit: <https://interoperable-europe.ec.europa.eu/collection/fosseps>

as genuine entry points for campaigns, not just background EU bureaucracy!



—WARNING: The FedVetery Logbook—
This logbook features stories with genuine quotes from actual people about real events, all collected during our research on Fediverse. Images are for informational purposes only. Opinions are personal and do not represent the Fediverse. We are not responsible for any harm from using this material. See about the post! Unless you can be a person. Then about the person.



March, 2025

An Intriguing Interplay

Four Years on the Fediverse; One Dick Pic



We left the rigid marble halls of EU institutions and plunged back into something softer: the Fediverse! Conversations there are honest and warm, awkward in the best way; authenticity smells like old books and fresh coffee. Toots land like heartbeats: Eager, informed, genuinely curious.

In the mid of our research an interviewee grinned and dropped the line that froze the room: “Four years here, one inappropriate image —one dick pic.” We laughed, then fell quiet. That offhand remark made us look closer.

Indeed. We found a network that, by design or temperament, encourages restraint: a quiet decency many big platforms lack. It’s a portrait of community norms and unspoken rules, and it raises a question: How does digital intimacy form when platform design and culture grow together —and what will that mean for future online relationships? Still—seriously—only one dick pic?

Billie

Epilogue: Reclaiming the Digital Public Sphere

By Peter Mechels

Over the past two years, alongside our research objective, we have navigated the intricate European maze of technology policy: in policy discussions, in conference halls, in the ongoing debate on digital sovereignty and the need to decouple democratic functions from dependency on Big Tech.

Europe's public debate currently takes place on platforms we don't own. These platforms prioritise engagement over deliberation and are governed by rules we didn't create. This isn't inevitable; it's the result of specific choices like regulatory inaction, chronic under-investment, and a comfortable dependence on profit-driven infrastructure rather than participation. The practical lessons on coordination, moderation, funding, and institutional responsibility that inform this piece point toward something larger: a deliberate, European approach to social infrastructure.

This is why we have expanded this document to include a Future Outlook: Reclaiming the Digital Public Sphere. This final section draws on insights from our presentations and public discussions, offering a personal reflection on a possible path forward. It's not a mandate but a suggestion for considering our digital future in the years ahead. "The situation is hopeless, but not (been taken) serious." ;)

7.1. Technology Was Never the Constraint

Research from Open Future, a European research institute and digital rights organisation, has repeatedly mapped a mature and technically capable CivicTech and public-digital-infrastructure landscape across Europe: from consultation platforms like Decidim to national open-source office suites, the tools to support genuine democratic participation already exist and are already being funded and built. What Open Future's work¹ keeps returning to is that the missing element is commitment, not code: without a consolidated European fund [33], without institutional mandate, and without the digital commons treated as infrastructure rather than as an innovation side-project, even mature tools stay marginal.

¹For an overview on their work on digital public infrastructure, visit openfuture.eu/our-work/public-digital-infrastructure/

Without institutional will, without a genuine mandate for citizen input and a closed feedback loop where people can see their voices influence outcomes, even the best-designed platform becomes a form of democratic theatre. A pilot like the EDPS's EU Voice and EU Video project we studied isn't sufficient if no one's willing to maintain it when it becomes politically unpopular. Even though the pilot itself demonstrates that the technology works, costs are manageable and feasibility has been proven. The transition from commercial dependency to open, federated infrastructure is not a distant prospect. It is a political choice.

Three conditions have to exist together for any alternative to take hold at EU scale:

1. *Institutional mandate*: someone politically accountable for the outcome
2. *Feedback architecture*: visible proof that citizen input changes decisions
3. *Sustained funding*: resourcing that survives election cycles, not tied to them

Where these three align, alternatives are not hypothetical. They are being built and used, at scale, across Europe, today.

But capability is not neutral, and this is where algorithms matter. Today's dominant platforms optimise for engagement and virality, and the resulting polarisation, addiction, and misinformation are not side effects. They are the business model. This isn't a design flaw; it's fundamentally political. Engagement-optimised systems will always produce these results unless they're built on different values from the start. A genuinely public alternative needs algorithms built around diversity, relevance, and reliability instead. That sounds simple until you try to do it.

Nodes On A Web

At the Nodes On A Web (NOAW) unconference in March 2026 sociologist Nikolaus Poehhacker explained through his ethnographic study of a public-service broadcaster developing a recommender system just how challenging this translation truly is in practice [52]. Public broadcasters in Germany are legally required to represent a diverse range of opinions. However, "diversity" isn't a simple variable a machine learning system can be told to optimise for [47]. Every step of translating this legal principle into a practical system involves judgement calls. These include how content is tagged, which signals count as engagement and how collaborative filtering manages minority viewpoints. These decisions are never fully automated. The implication follows directly: public-interest algorithms cannot be shipped once and left alone. Like public broadcasters or libraries, they need ongoing democratic oversight, not a one-time design fix.

7.2. The Answer: Portfolio Diversification

We borrow a logic most people already understand from the world of finance: you don't put all your democratic eggs in one (algorithmic) basket. Not because any single platform is inherently bad, but because concentration of dependency is itself the risk. A public sphere where political discourse, civic information, and deliberation all pass through three or four private, non-European platforms is fragile, exposed to moderation decisions, ownership changes, advertising pressures, and geopolitical shifts. This is compounded by the sheer scale of the incumbents: they command trillions in valuation and billions of users, and no single European instance, protocol, or initiative can match that scale alone. What can match it is an ecosystem. It provides shared infrastructure and open protocols enabling small builders to swiftly create social apps and allowing users to move freely between them. This fosters network effects that benefit everyone rather than being monopolised by a single entity [74].

This doesn't call for an overnight utopian replacement of big tech. Instead it calls for parallel investment: staying present where audiences are today, while deliberately building, funding, using, and normalising the alternatives, until resilience and real competition exist where there is currently only dependency.

Plus1

A concrete, portable version of this logic already exists in German civil society's demands to the government. The "Plus1-Prinzip," developed by Ralf Stockmann of Berlin's Zentral- und Landesbibliothek and adopted by the Bündnis Offene Netzwerke und Demokratische Öffentlichkeiten, requires public institutions to maintain a presence on at least one open independent network, with roughly the same financial and editorial effort as on commercial platforms. Judgement should be based on concrete criteria like posting frequency and citizen interaction rather than raw reach.²

This same instinct is evident in how Baden-Württemberg's state government has managed its communications since 2020. It continued to post on Facebook and Twitter/X as long as significant numbers of citizens were active, while simultaneously building out a robust Mastodon presence, including its own state-run instance hosted by the data protection commissioner's office. This instance now hosts over forty public bodies and explicitly describes the open alternative as "not yet a replacement but an addition" that should be taken seriously [27]. The Dutch government has been moving, more haltingly, in a similar direction: its Information Council of communications directors has recommended that ministries scale back or leave X over its role in spreading disinformation, even as the cabinet has so far resisted a full break with Meta's platforms, citing the practical need to reach citizens where they already are [2]. Read together,

²For an overview of the demands, please visit offene-netzwerke.eu/forderungen/

these are the same three-word policy in different registers: stay, but also build.

7.3. Fediverse and Atmosphere. Both Have Built Exit Doors, But No Doors Between Each Other

Magnifica Humanitas

Where this gets genuinely interesting is in what happens once the "plus one" open network actually exists. Journalist Laurens Hof, writing at Connected Places, drew an unexpectedly precise diagnosis of this problem out of Pope Leo XIV's May 2026 encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, on safeguarding the human person in the age of artificial intelligence[29]. The encyclical leans on the Catholic doctrine of subsidiarity: whatever a smaller unit –a family, a community– can handle should not be decided by a bigger one, and the bigger unit's job is to help the smaller one act rather than absorb it. Crucially, Leo XIV pairs subsidiarity with solidarity: subsidiarity without solidarity collapses into the protection of narrow interests, while solidarity without subsidiarity degenerates into a paternalism that never actually asks people to take responsibility for anything.

Subsidiarity vs. Solidarity

Consider the Fediverse and the Atmosphere together. This pairing reveals a close parallel to two opposing failure modes. The Fediverse prioritises subsidiarity over solidarity: thousands of independently governed servers with near-total local autonomy, but minimal shared infrastructure for instance relationships, no federated diplomacy, and no shared commons for joint stewardship. The Atmosphere faces the inverse challenge: solidarity without subsidiarity. Bluesky PBC manages the infrastructure that supports the majority of the network and absorbs most of the costly, thankless moderation work performed by others. It has developed and published tools for anyone to run their own AppView, PDS, relay, or labeller, but few people actually use them, leaving users feeling stripped of the agency these tools were designed to restore.

Both ecosystems have solved leaving. Neither has solved staying together. That is precisely the challenge a European strategy of portfolio diversification must confront. Diversification only yields resilience if the platforms also contribute to each other's success. Some promising work is already addressing this gap. For example, projects like Eurobridge (BridgyFed) connect Eurosky and the European Fediverse, enabling transparent interactions across protocols. Furthermore, distributed identity efforts, potentially integrated with the European Digital ID Wallet, ³ allow people to carry

³For more information, please visit https://commission.europa.eu/topics/digital-economy-and-society/european-digital-identity_en

portable and protected identities across networks, freeing them from being locked to a single system. Shared content-moderation infrastructure aligned with the DSA and DMA (for CSAM, NCII, and TVEC) points the same way: shared tooling that individual operators don't have to build alone. None of this closes the subsidiarity–solidarity gap on its own, but it is the beginning of the "doors between each other" that neither ecosystem has built yet.

7.4. Who Has the Leverage

The actors with the most leverage are the ones most captured by convenience:

- Governments, as anchor users who legitimise alternatives by using them
- Public media, as builders of shared infrastructure
- Political parties and civil society organisations, as setters of new norms

Europe's own recent experience shows how easily "using an alternative" can become theatre in exactly the sense warned against above. When the European Commission migrated the accounts of its President and the European Central Bank's President from Bluesky to W-Social –a for-profit Swedish network built on the same open AT Protocol– it chose a proprietary platform over Eurosky. Eurosky is a non-profit fully open-source EU-hosted AT Protocol network already doing the harder, less flattering work of building European social infrastructure in the open [4, 18, 34]. This decision landed just after the Commission's own Tech Sovereignty Package, and it illustrates the trap precisely: "digital sovereignty" that is satisfied by hosting data in Europe, without insisting on open governance and open code, produces exactly the kind of solidarity-without-subsidiarity dependency the Pope's framework warns about –just with a European flag on it instead of an American one.

Capturing the Flag

This isn't a critique of the ATProto protocol or the Atmosphere ecosystem itself. It's a critique of implementations that centralise control within a single commercially-governed entity. These implementations are evaluated against simple criteria: a transparent publicly published moderation and federation policy, genuine interoperability and exit options to avoid lock-in, a non-extractive funding model, clearly defined and accountable ownership and verifiable compliance rather than mere claims. Where an ATProto-based service meets those conditions, it strengthens the ecosystem that Elena Rossini advocates for in her article [18]. Where it doesn't, it replicates the same dynamic as demonstrated in the W-Social case; as a single controllable asset.

7.5. The Stakes Are Economic as Much as Democratic

Billions of euros leave Europe every year, captured by a handful of platforms that dictate how we communicate and organise. We have accepted this as the cost of connection. But it doesn't have to be that way. If that value were channeled into our own ecosystem, it could fund local jobs, strengthen open-source communities, and build a genuine European Social Stack: infrastructure in the public interest that democratic societies can rely on, rather than having to rent it with a blank cheque.

The European Social Stack

The European Social Stack declaration,⁴ launched in June 2026 by organisations including Mastodon, Lemmy, Eurosky and others, outlines how this diverse plurality could function in practice. Rather than a single European platform dominating the landscape, it envisions three complementary layers working together: private messaging protocols like Matrix and XMPP, the Fediverse (including Mastodon, PeerTube and Mobilizon) and the Atmosphere (Eurosky and other AT Protocol services). These layers are interconnected, allowing builders and users to choose from a variety of options without being constrained by a single platform. They are bridged to each other so builders and users are not forced to pick a single winner. Together these layers cover extensive ground: private and group messaging, grassroots community networks, and large-scale public social media. They are not competing approaches but interlocking layers of a resilient whole, and the declaration is explicit that a diversity of ownership models and protocols (community-owned, privately owned, non-profit, co-operative, publicly funded, ad-supported, subscription-based) is a feature to be built for, and not a fragmentation problem to be solved. It is a useful indication precisely because what the W-Social episode shows is missing from official EU practice.

7.6. This Is a Political Choice, Not a Technical One

The concentration of power we live with today was achieved through inaction, and it can be undone through deliberate institutional action. While citizens can push, build, and adopt change, the decisive weight falls on those with institutional power, who must accept short-term friction for the sake of long-term democratic resilience.

The Digital Commons EDIC

Finally, structures for doing this at scale are emerging. The Digital Commons EDIC, a European Digital Infrastructure Consortium comprising France, Germany, Italy, Luxem-

⁴For more information, please visit <https://european.social>

bourg and the Netherlands with its headquarters in Paris, was formally launched on 11 December 2025 in The Hague [1]. This launch marks the first time Member States will have a shared legal and governance framework for funding and scaling digital commons across borders. This includes open-source office suites and shared infrastructure for public administration. Its remit runs across four interconnected functions. Firstly, it provides a stable long-term home as they transition from pilot to operational service. Secondly, it establishes a coordination framework for sustainable funding including the proposed EU Sovereign Tech Fund currently being piloted with the German Sovereign Tech Agency.⁵ Thirdly, it serves as a one-stop shop offering legal technical financial and administrative guidance. Finally, it provides coordinated procurement support pooling expertise into shared model clauses to help contracting authorities avoid duplication that benefits large incumbent providers.

At the launch, technologist and long-time Dutch government advisor Bert Hubert delivered a keynote⁶ that was intentionally more critical than celebratory. He emphasised the need for Europe to explicitly pursue digital commons rather than merely “digital autonomy” in a narrow sense. He pointed out that a European-owned cloud giant could achieve sovereignty without actually creating a commons. Hubert then outlined a short and concrete task list for the EDIC: help fund the less glamorous “as-a-service” layer that good open-source tools currently lack remove unnecessary friction hindering European alternatives’ ease of use compared to their American counterparts and leverage its convening power to showcase Member States’ successful examples rather than starting from scratch each time. His closing warning is worth carrying into any European social-media strategy as much as into office software: an institution generally only gets one credible attempt at a platform migration, so the groundwork has to be right before the announcement, not after it.

The EU Sovereign Tech Fund

Open Future’s Policy Brief offers early promising indicators here: growing Member State engagement and the launch of the EU Sovereign Tech Fund pilot suggest the conditions for meaningful impact are forming. But translating this momentum into lasting outcomes will need sustained political commitment and sufficient long-term investment [5].

⁵For more information, please visit <https://www.sovereign.tech/programs/fund>.

⁶For more information, please visit <https://berthub.eu/articles/posts/keynote-opening-digital-commons-edic-eu/>

7.7. What's Needed Now

A Coordinated Collaborative Collective

The simplest honest answer to "what can we do to reclaim the digital public sphere?" remains the same one our research trajectory keeps arriving at: *a collective, collaborative, coordinated effort*, paired with the bravery to actually experiment –and, as the DC-EDIC's first year is already showing, the discipline to insist that "European" alternatives are actually open, not just relocated. The infrastructure exists. The models for adoption are proven. The expertise is growing with every pilot and every new institution that joins. The missing element isn't capability; it's the political will to act and the coordinated effort to translate that will into lasting reality. So... *Please let us do the right thing before doing the things right.*



—WARNING: The FediVox Logbook—
This logbook features stories with genuine quotes from actual people about real events, all collected during our research on Fediverse integration with Public-Adaptation.com. Quotes are generated, organizations and quoted individuals are not responsible for any harm from using this material. So, always be careful! Unless you can be a person, then don't be a person.



April, 2025

A Cry for Seducing Playbooks

A Taste of Tech Sovereignty



In the middle of Brussels, a conference room buzzed with tension. Glass walls watched as a whistleblower leaned in, eyes bright with urgent news. “We’re at a crossroads,” they said. “Mastodon isn’t just an app. It’s a move toward tech sovereignty. Imagine institutions running without big companies controlling them.” Their excitement was electric.

“The EU’s tech future depends on open source. —independent, resilient, and not owned by anyone. We need a plan that wins over policymakers and excites the public.”

Ideas sparked between us. “Mastodon could change how democracy works,” they said. “But first we must stop outsourcing our freedoms.”

Their words landed like steady blows —politics mixed with passion. Shared goals warmed the room and grew into a quiet, powerful energy. “Ready?” they asked, part challenge, part invitation. The promise felt risky and thrilling.

Billie

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February, 2025

Exploring the Layers of Seduction

Juggling the Hot Potato



We walked through the halls of European institutions, sharing quiet discoveries. Today's topic was the EDPS Fediverse pilot, "EU Voice/Video."

The mood was tense and a bit secretive. "The Commission has nothing to hide; it went smoothly," the interviewee said, relieved but still uneasy. "Who wants this hot potato? No one. But we did it. —If others could, why not us?"

They warned about complications, especially around open-source duties. "EDPS knows what it wants; they need to write clear guidelines," they said. "After all, it's their potato!"

Their excitement rose as they talked about balancing innovation and risk. From their view we saw the real challenges public institutions face today — complex, pulled between ambition and caution.

Billie