

The ECI as a Hybrid Participatory Genre

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The aim of this chapter is to clarify the practices and representations of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) through the use of genre theories. The application of genre theories to participation in public policy making can contribute to the research on the successes and failures of citizen participation, on the reasons why citizens participate or not, or why they participate in ways different from those expected and promoted by the organisers of participatory projects. The ambition in this chapter is therefore to add clarity to the ECI, derived from a theoretical model that can reveal the ambiguities surrounding the genre and highlight the uncertainties, confusions and tensions that such ambiguities generates.

The starting point of the proposed approach is the idea that “genres of participation specify particular but recognizable social and semiotic conventions for generating, interpreting and engaging with embedded practices with and through media” (Livingstone/Lunt, 2013: 5). What is usually referred to as participatory ‘methods’, ‘activities’, or ‘applications’ in the field of policy participation – e.g. consultations, petitions, citizens’ panels, civic juries, opinion polls, online debate forums (Van Dijk, 2009) – will here be regarded as *participatory genres* (Erickson, 1997). This theoretical framework is informed by a pragmatic approach, which allows well thought-out policy participation in terms of the conventions replicated, negotiated, contested or transformed by a range of social agents (i.e. governments, administrations, organised groups, individuals, citizens) positioned in different contexts (Armengaud, 1985). The intention is to analyse the misunderstandings that can arise amongst stakeholders with regard to different cultures of participation; in other words, on the participatory genre as a set of *organizing structures* (Orlikowski/Yates, 1998) in the context of citizen participation.

The empirical analysis is based on interviews with ECIs’ committee members, online observations (ECIs’ Facebook pages, Twitter, ECIs’ websites) and participant observations within the Belgian committees of two ECIs. The analysis demonstrates that the etiquette applied to the ECI – the terms employed (by authorities, practitioners, press and academics) – can lead to confusion and ultimately also to a different kind of

participation, since citizens analyse the etiquette based on what it evokes for them. As an example, it could be mentioned that the concept of “petition” is more meaningful to many stakeholders than the concept of “initiative”.

Civil society has repeatedly criticised the ECI and the Commission’s view of this participatory mechanism, indicating that the stakeholders have dissimilar expectations to the genre’s definition. Depending on the stakeholders, the ECI has been found to generate a series of representations and variable expectations. These concern the kind of participation which the participants refer to as well as how they act and interpret their own actions and those of others.

The main purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how ambiguity in the genre definition of such a participatory project can be a source of tension, uncertainty, incomprehension or blockages. The practices and representations of participation surrounding the ECI are examined through the use of genre theories. The study shows that there are numerous activities around the ECI process, arguing that genre theories can help explain disagreements among those involved and inform the shift to a hybrid genre, combining three existing genres: initiative, petition and campaigning.

1. The ECI: Observing a Major Ambiguity in Terms and Usages

A short survey of ECI discourse in official and academic sources as well as the media indicates major terminological ambiguity and displays difficulties – for practitioners and citizens alike – in making sense of and reacting to the ECI.

Official Discourses

The Treaty on European Union (2009: article 11.4) announces an “*initiative of inviting* the European Commission (...) to submit any appropriate proposal.”¹ Such a “proposal” for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council (European Commission, 2010: 2) is referred to as “*participatory democracy*”, “*a citizens’ initiative*”. Interestingly, it seemed important to EU actors to underline “that the

1 Emphasis added.

citizens' initiative is an *agenda setting initiative*", noting in particular that "whilst it does not affect the *Commission's right of initiative*, it will, however, oblige the Commission (...) to give serious consideration to the requests". Therefore, the term "initiative" can accommodate varying interpretations. To further complicate the situation, the official discourse itself is not always clear. The European Ombudsman (2014: 1) described the ECI "as a means of *engaging with policy making*", while the Council of the European Union (2011: 1) confirmed the fact that it would become possible for citizens "to call for *legislative proposals* on a specific issue", with the ECI acting as an important instrument for encouraging "*deliberation* and political participation" across national borders in the EU. In some cases, even though it might seem clear, official discourse can provoke confusion among citizens regarding the potential impact of an initiative. For instance, the European Parliament (2010: 6) announced that this "procedure affords citizens the possibility of *directly approaching* the Commission, conferring on them a *right of initiative similar to that exercised by the European Parliament and the Council*".

Press and Practitioners

The *Mediapart* blog² (Villa, 2014) claims that the ECI enables EU citizens to "*participate directly* in the development of European policies, *questioning* the European Commission on the necessity of using its power of legislative initiative". The *La Croix* journal (Dancer, 2014) presents the ECI as an "instrument of *participatory democracy* which enables European citizens to *alert* their leaders to themes that seem ignored or badly addressed". To them, the function of alerting seems to be an integral part of the "initiative" genre. When the information site *NetPolitique* (2011) portrays the ECI as a new "*online channel for transmitting* European '*citizens' views*' to the European institutions", it inevitably leads the readers to develop a restrictive interpretation.

Interestingly, the participants define the ECI in many different ways: "petition", "campaign", "proposition", "law", "appeal", "initiative" – all indicators of a challenge within this genre. In addition, there are various understandings of the very act of *signing* an ECI. Participants often make reference to a "legislative initiative", also revealing confusion about the political genre. Considering the discourse of the institutions leading the

2 Own translation.

genre, one could assume that the European Parliament would take responsibility for such a process. Therefore, the architecture of the EU leads to a gap between the classic points of reference; several participants expect that the “initiative” genre will lead to a transition from indirect to direct legitimation, thereby enriching the representative system.

The ECI suffers from civil actors’ difficulties with identifying what it really is. Numerous associations have told us that they “cannot clearly see exactly what good it will do them – what i

s different about this from other means that are already available”. Some actors on the ground do not see the ECI it as a powerful tool, preferring to continue their usual activism instead of using this tool, which they misunderstand or consider insufficient.

Scientific Community

For the scientific community, it is not necessarily easier to describe the ECI clearly; scholars do not agree on the label to be applied to the ECI. For example, Grönlund and Sussha (2012) speak of “e-Petitioning”; Cuesta-López (2012: 257) compares the ECI to “analogous popular initiatives in national constitutions”; Petrescu (2014: 5) goes so far as to describe it as “the first supranational instrument of direct democracy”. However, numerous scholars consider the ECI as “far from an instrument of direct democracy”, but rather as “an additional ‘opportunity structure’” (Vogiatzis, 2013: 90), “an agenda-setting tool having hardly, if any, direct impact on EU decision-making” (Van Brussel, 2013: 2). Indeed, as Smith (2012: 281) points out, the term “citizens’ initiative” implies a direct democratic design, in which “the successful collection of signatures is followed by a binding popular vote on the proposition”, which is not the case here.

The ambiguity in the definition of a participatory project can contribute to it being taken up in ways different from those intended, which can result in disappointments. The definition of a participatory genre provides a more nuanced analysis of how the initiative is taken up by its users. An ambiguous definition of the genre gives rise to unexpected uses and effects.

The ECI is clearly an emerging hybrid genre. It is a new kind of initiative, or as Kaufmann (2010) put it: “there is no equivalent tool in the international arena”. When new initiatives emerge, people invest in, think of and understand them by associating them with other participatory

genres that they already know (e.g. consultation, petition, initiative, campaigning). As a matter of fact, new initiatives are necessarily based on previous examples. Faced with this new hybrid genre, the next step is to examine how the different stakeholders invest in the ECI as a participatory genre and thereby contribute to giving meaning to this new hybrid genre. It will thus be attempted to show how genre theories can provide various elements for an analytical framework of practices and representations of the ECI.

2. Analysing the ECI Through Genre Theories

Yates and Orlikowski (2002: 14) define the genre as a “socially recognized type of communicative action habitually enacted by organizational members to realize particular communicative and collaborative purposes”. They also show that genres include expectations of communities and roles, reproduced and utilised in communicative utterances. Genres define six dimensions of communication (Orlikowski/Yates, 1998): purposes (*why*), i.e. the socially admitted aims of the genres that compose it; forms (*how*), i.e. the formal aspects of the genres; contents (*what*); participants (*who/m*); time (*when*), i.e. temporal expectations, and place (*where*), i.e. where a communication activity will take place.

In a previous article, the present author and Patriarche (2011) proposed a theoretical framework for the study of citizen participation in public policy making based on genre theory, showing that designing participatory methods as typified repertoires of more or less stable and socially shared elements and the participatory genres as cultural interfaces (Ridell, 2005) can be useful in the study of the stakeholders’ communicative actions, as they struggle to negotiate participation within a genre. In addition, we argued that participatory genres in public policy-making could be characterised by *repertoires of elements* (Lacey, 2000), all more or less specific and socially accepted.

In the table below, certain elements of the previous analysis grid are re-used (Dufrasne/Patriarche, 2011), combined with the preceding theoretical considerations and applied to the ECI. This allows for a characterisation of the different communicative processes at work within the ECI instruments, the dissimilar meanings that the actors give to their actions, and the ways in which the instrument influences how it is taken up by the participants. These elements will also enable an exploration of the reasons

why actors have their particular interpretation of the ECI as well as an observation of the nuances in the way in which the genres are enacted, reproduced, negotiated, disputed or transformed.

Why	How	What	Who/m	When	Where
Purpose	Form	Content	Participants	Frequency	Location of activity
Participatory purpose	Communication medium	Type of problem	Ratified participants	Duration	Location of access
	Communication flow		Legitimated initiator		
	Communication style		Identity, role, profile		

Why (Purpose)

The concept of communicative purpose goes back to socially allowed objectives within a community. Returning to Swales' (1990) definition, a genre can be defined as "the constrained and conventional ways we use to fulfil a communicative purpose" (Kjellberg, 2009: 9).

Each genre is associated with more or less specific aims. If one refers to a common meaning, a petition typically aims at influencing the agenda of decision makers by presenting a series of problems or challenges, while the resulting consultation is meant to give the involved parties an opportunity to express their point of view and deliberate on the issue. With this in consideration, the ECI's problem is obvious: it is *announced* as an instrument for agenda setting, *implemented* as a petition and often unconsciously *perceived* as a proper legislative initiative. How can the participatory aims of an initiative that is perceived as hybrid be socially shared? Each genre has its aim, and the aim of a petition is not the same as that of an initiative.

A participatory aim presupposes a balance of power between the participants, distinguishing roughly between those who do and those who do not have decision-making powers. From this point of view, a participatory genre necessarily refers back to the applicable socio-political context, in particular established power relations. Within the framework of

the ECI, the power balances between the European institutions and citizens obviously remain uneven. Numerous actors on the ground who are using the ECI do not seem ready to accept the fact that it is an absolutely non-constraining tool. The confusion with a typical popular initiative is flagrant, as the organisers of the ECI *One of Us* state that “either this application will be successful, in which case the ECI will become what it was intended to be: an instrument of participatory democracy; or, it will be rejected, which will mean that the ECI is a false mechanism of participatory democracy” (Belgicatho, 2014). This highlights the uncertainty about the genre which they are involved in. It is evident that depending upon the individual point of view, there seems to be a lack of comprehension in the genre – the genre of one group not being the same as that of the others. The reasons for this dissension on genre are many; in particular, an insufficient clarification of the participation goal or a lack of citizen control of the participation codes.

To show the misunderstandings about the genre between the different ECI stakeholders, it is necessary to identify which aims each of the ECI actors envisaged for his or her participation: First of all, it must be emphasised that the Commission accepted to implement the ECI in order to enable “bottom-up” decision-making, thereby intending to improve the image of the institution and legitimise the decision. Citizens sign in order for their voices to be heard, to get the feeling that they have some influence on European politics, to take part in the political arena, to give their support to a proposal they wish to see put on the table – in general, to get the feeling of having “achieved something”.

Political parties temporarily associate themselves with NGOs to pursue a common aim through ECI instruments. It has been found that political parties or representatives, who initiate or support an ECI, regularly contribute to blurring the contours of the ‘citizen initiative’ genre (see further in the “Who/m” section).

The promoters of an ECI principally invest in this instrument for hopes of seeing a given subject dealt with by the Commission, making their proposal known to the citizens and prompting public debate. However, in most cases, the promoters hope that their proposal will lead to a legislative act as such. It may be noted that the signatories and promoters share the aim of participating in the decision-making process (to a different extent). Some use the ECI as a means of making their association known; others participate in the ECI to promote increased participatory democracy at the European level.

How (Form)

All genre theories consider genres to be defined by formal regularities. For Orlikowski and Yates (1998), the form of a genre articulates material (i.e. communication medium), structural and linguistic/symbolic aspects. Building on the idea of a genre organising formal aspects of communication, a theory of how a participatory genre can fashion the flow, style and medium of communication of a participatory initiative can be developed.

First, participatory genres can structure *communication flows* between the recipients. This can follow three models: participation may take a *transmissive* form, when it acts to broadcast a message to the citizens, as well as a *reactive* form, following the model of “information feedback” from citizens to decision-makers, which the OECD (2002) associates with consultation. It may also take an *interactive* form, when a dialogue is established between the recipients (between decision-makers and citizens and/or among citizens themselves). The ECI as such is a hybrid model, adopting a transmissive form when a proposition is submitted, as well as a reactive (towards the Commission) and interactive form (between associations and citizens and among the associations themselves) during the signature collection campaign. Deliberation remains marginal to the initiative process, as it only occurs between the supporting associations themselves or to convince the signatories; and briefly at the end of the process, during the Parliamentary hearing, provided that the ECI has collected the required signatures.

One could go further and consider that in relation to the known communication flows (a top-down communication flow, a reactive flow following a consultation or a dialogical flow in a meeting), the connotations of the term “initiative” are simultaneously an hitherto unknown flow which can, however, be perceived as linear. In fact, for the first time at the European level, the citizens – using an official initiative – are at the origin of a direct communication flow with the institutions. In this case, communication is assessed as if the citizens were the departure point. The ECI is presented as an initiative where it is the citizens who, together, submit a proposition. Once again, there is ambiguity, for does the citizen really “take the initiative” in this communication flow? For this reason, the citizens are faced with great difficulties in clarifying the meaning of their actions and identifying the process that they are involved in.

Second, participatory genres could be formally characterised by a more or less specific *communication style*. The proposition formulated by means of the ECI must be very short; the strict rules on this point demand an extremely concise formulation. After submitting the proposition, the official platform only requires personal data enabling the identification of a signature; therefore, it does not need a very elaborate communication style. The response the Commission gives to an ECI committee that has collected the required one million signatures remains relatively short and highly bureaucratic. The debates in the European Parliament during an ECI hearing are also very restricted. The communication style is in fact only open and expansive on the margins of the initiative.

Aiming at a million signatures can lead to a dilution of the message, for instance when drafting slogans on Twitter. It cannot be overly political, for fear of alienating potential supporters. Within a genre that should be political, what counts in the end are numbers, i.e. mass campaigning, mainly via the web. The ECI is far from the traditional “petition” genre involving a group of highly politicised activists.

Third, a participatory genre can structure participation by designating appropriate *communication media*. Some participatory genres, such as an online debate forum, are obviously defined by the use of a certain communication medium. The ECI, requiring the collection of one million signatures throughout Europe, encourages the use of the internet, particularly Twitter and Facebook, making media an integral part of the genre. A major section of the research on digital genres questions the role of technology in the formation and transformation of genres. In the case of the ECI, technology is fundamental to the genre; the use of Facebook or Twitter also leads to a certain style of communication. This shows an interdependence between the elements of a genre: a type of medium that favours a type of communications or a particular type of “campaigning”, namely clicktivism, defined “as the act or habit of using the internet as a primary means of participating and influencing public/political agendas through websites, online petitions and mass email campaigns” (Carrara, 2012: 363). The fact that Twitter is one of the main campaign mediums leads to a “marketing” communication style with short, catchy slogans, meaning that a large section of the public loses much of the fundamental debate. When using Twitter or Facebook, the form of petitioning and campaigning inevitably becomes crucial by comparison to what they could have been in the project initially planned by the institutions. This dimension distorts the ECI towards the “campaign” or “mobilisation” genre, with all that it entails. Creating a buzz appears to have become the

the main aim. The idea of hybridising genres (when genres overlap or when initially separate genres merge) is pertinent to show that the “initiative” genre becomes a petition onto which a campaigning dimension is grafted.

When the participatory genre (or the expectations that it generates) is not respected by those in power, citizens or associations sometimes try to short-circuit the expected function or create variations within the genre (conversion into a pressure group). The genre of the ECI is paradoxically both highly indistinct and extremely precisely framed at the same time. For this reason, numerous associations felt restricted by the framework and try to alter the genre; many committees wanted to organise a conference or a round-table discussion with citizens and experts, since they thought their campaign should be put up for debate. In general, associations that promote debate about European questions do not feel at ease with an initiative that is not sufficiently deliberative: “you are for or against the proposition. Full stop”.

What (Content)

The idea that a genre comprises regularities of substance is present in all genre theories. On a theoretical level, it is primarily the set of themes in the content which are targeted (Bakhtin, 1986; Erickson, 1997; Kjellberg, 2009). Therefore, it must be asked what type of problem can be addressed by an ECI (in relation, of course, to what this permits in terms of the relevant competences of the Commission).

The European scale requires an increase in scope, and a sufficiently broad definition of the problem, in order to fit the different national realities. The ECIs that achieved the greatest success are those that many can agree on (e.g. *Right2Water* or *Stop Vivisection*), or those that address a problem in the interest of a certain group, but are supported by a powerful European-wide network (e.g. *One of us*). Most ECIs are too narrowly targeted to gather a million signatures (e.g. *Weed like to talk*); too politicised, risking attracting too much ideological opposition (e.g. *New Deal 4 Europe*); too far from some national realities (e.g. *European Initiative for Media Pluralism*), or too closely associated with commercial interests (e.g. *European Free Vaping Initiative*).

Some actors complain that the Commission imposes an overly restrictive limit for the formulation of the proposition. If a committee believes it is drawing up a demand for a legislative proposition, how can it

be that a legislative proposal has to fit in an “object box” with no more than 200 characters? Here, a short proposition is part of the ECI’s contents as an example of the “citizens’ initiative” genre, whereas numerous actors expect to be able to further develop their proposition. This kind of contents also fosters tensions.

A very short, general and sufficiently consensual proposal can lead to the Commission giving an equally broad and consensual response. At the European level, the transnational aspect and the necessity of being supported by a transnational network leads to a dilution of the contents of some propositions.

Who/m (Participants)

A participatory genre identifies, in a more or less clear and stabilised way, what Goffman (1981) would call *ratified participants*, i.e. those who are recognised as being able to take part in the interaction in progress. For every ECI, the Commission requires the establishment of a citizens’ committee, which will constitute this ratified partner. The signatories of an ECI recognise the organisers’ committee as the ratified partner in the initiative.

The participatory genre can identify *legitimate initiators*. The ECI illustrates the emergence or redeployment of citizens’ initiatives, in which “ordinary” citizens are the initiators, even though the difficulty of implementing an ECI means that not all citizens can launch one.

Through the *modes of address* (Goffman, 1981) underlying, in particular, the discourses of the participatory instrument’s organising authority, participatory genres would position the participant in a certain manner – as a customer, user, citizen, activist, public – not only in relation to the organising authority, but also in relation to the other participants. The ECI is ambiguous; one can conceive of citizens as users of an initiative implemented by an institution, but also as potential producers of a legislative proposition (in the case of a successful ECI). They then become co-actors in the process of drafting a law. These two visions can be a source of ambiguity. If citizens only consider the second vision – although the processes often remain at the stage corresponding to the first view – it leads to a feeling of having been deceived, of dashed hopes. Moreover, this participatory instrument does not prevent its governing administrative structures from continuing to place the citizen in a

particular role: that of a consumer of participation rather than an actual actor in the decision-making process.

Peculiarly, when signing an ECI, signatories seem to perceive the Commission as the recipient, but this is not really the case. In fact, they merely support a proposition that a group of associations or citizens wants to submit to the Commission for examination. To whom do these participants address their communications? They support a “petition” drawn up by other citizens/associations, whose final recipient is the Commission, but their main contact point is a peer (an intermediary) and not the Commission directly. This misperception exposes that the participants are not properly aware of what exactly they are involved in. It should also be noted that its very nature is ambiguous: the initiative is put in place by an institution, but it is the citizens/associations who are principally responsible for it.

The ECI may be presented by the Commission as a tool for citizens, but it is often described as an instrument primarily destined for NGOs (ordinary citizens remaining “simple” signatories). This usually involves professionalised Brussels-based civil-society organisations (CSOs); some even defend themselves against the fact that “successful ECIs could be biased towards large CSOs (...) rather than supporting minorities to make their voice heard in the ‘European public’” (De Clerck-Sachsse, 2012).

In addition, numerous national MPs and MEPs participate in ECIs on one level or another. Thus, in terms of genre theory, it is significant to see democratic representatives use and become part of instruments of participatory democracy. Does the unique nature of the European political system bring about a blurring of the borders between genres that are generally used by citizens and those that are generally used by elected representatives? Typically, the petition (if one refers to the balance of power and to the genre) is mainly used as a genre for “the weak”, those who want to make themselves heard by “the strong”. Therefore, it is generally citizens, organised or not, who use this genre, whereas MPs use established genres, such as a legislative proposition or a parliamentary question.

An analysis of the ECI promoters’ communication strategies on Twitter reveals that the signature of a well-known personality (political representative, intellectual, writer, etc.) is widely publicised and used to advertise the initiative. To be supported by such personalities and make use of it for communication purposes is very typical for the “campaigning” genre. This element shows once again how the ECI – a

hybrid genre – can in fact be perceived in multiple ways, depending on how people choose to use it.

When (Timing of Participation)

The *moment* defines the genre. In this case, the moment is indistinct; the proposition of an ECI can have an effect on different stages of a legislative process. Some are completely new propositions (e.g. *New Deal 4 Europe*), while others relate to a current legislative project (e.g. *Stop TTIP*) or even attempt to modify existing legislation (e.g. *30km/h*).

The *duration of the period*, over which the initiative is implemented, is criticised by participants. In fact, the promoters of the ECI consider the period of one year as too short to conduct an effective campaign in order to collect such a high number of signatures. The fundamental question is whether the ECI, as an example of a new genre, can be properly based on a yearlong collection of signatures. A typical legislative initiative, between an MP proposal and the approval, lasts at least several months, sometimes even years. In the case of an ECI, the timing of the genre is based on a yearlong campaign to collect signatures that only serve to launch the classic legislation process.

Where (Location of Participation)

Moreover, a genre structures a space in which communication takes place (online or offline) and which is appropriate for interaction. Orlikowski and Yates (1998) provide an example of the organisers of a conference calling for propositions. In doing so, they provide an e-mail address to which communications can be sent. The place to sign an ECI (i.e. the ‘where’) becomes the equivalent of the ‘from where’, as the ECI can be accessed by any given person from virtually any given location: at the office, at home, travelling abroad, etc.). In the case of an initiative (principally online) at the European level, the ‘from where’ becomes significant because some signatories (Belgians, for example) will sign as Belgians from abroad, or will access the website labelled as “European” (which can be accessed from anywhere) from a particular country.

With participation on a European scale, the place would become a constituent part of the genre. Indeed, extensive participation by the general public requires the use of the internet. The ECI uses web sites in order to reach the minimum number of signatures in at least seven member states.

To support an ECI, the signatories must consult the dedicated site. This shows that it remains a legislative proposition linked to an institution; it is not a case of citizens who use a site where anything and everything can be proposed. The official platform of the Commission marks out the genre, defines the register within which one is operating, while the dedicated site specifies the 'where', the European arena. However, it should be noted that in theory, within the framework of a legislative initiative, one would expect that the place for participation would be the Parliament, and not the Commission.

Is the internet seen as the obvious channel? The fact that it is an initiative at the European level suggests that signatures can only be collected online. However, the results show that a significant number of signatures are also gathered on paper. Several promoters organise effective collections in the street or at stands at events. Collection on paper would almost constitute a variation of the genre. Furthermore, it could be assumed that the internet facilitates a particular genre. The ECI requires the formation of networks, the quest for supporters and the collection of many signatures. Hierleman and Wohlfarth (2010: 5) point out that "Internet technology is probably the best way of putting all this into practice".

Conclusion

The concept of a participatory genre encourages experts to increase awareness, since their identities, speeches and behaviour (among other factors) – whether intentionally or not – create the framework of participation, organise the interaction and generate expectations among citizens, in light of which the results of a participatory act will be evaluated.

As has been shown here, participation via the ECI requires a basic understanding of the participatory genre as well as of the practices that potential participants will take part in. In order for this to happen, the ECI has to be identifiable as a more or less familiar genre. There are variations and ways of understanding and supporting the genre, which in the end do not necessarily weaken the ECI as such, but can in fact reinforce it. For instance, those who debate or collect signatures on paper are encouraged to contact people whom they would not have contacted otherwise. These gaps in the genre's understanding do not call into question its overall coherence. But from another point of view, there are tensions within

certain elements of the genre that can pose problems or even weaken the ECI.

The ECI is a hybrid genre, where one genre takes precedence over another. The campaigning dimension takes over from the basic political intention. Originally, there was not supposed to be a debate – it was not the aim of the officials – but rather people simply supporting the cause. The legislative proposition may generally come from a political idea that is to be translated into a concrete legislative proposal. In the case of the the ECI, however, the political idea is often diluted to the point where it becomes almost apolitical. The frame of reference becomes clicktivism, to the detriment of ideology.

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