

# I Shipped 24 Doors Before the Hackathon

A Hedegreen Research build note on 24 Doors, civic language access in Europe, and the suspicious timing of arriving in Brussels with a tool that already fit the room.

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I shipped 24 Doors before the hackathon.

That is the plain version.

The stranger version is that 24 Doors almost looks like the kind of project somebody would invent to win that room on purpose.

It is visual.

It is European without needing explanation.

It turns an abstract democratic problem into something you can see in a few seconds.

It is small enough to demo.

It is deep enough not to collapse after the demo.

That is exactly what makes the timing slightly funny.

Or slightly suspicious.

Because 24 Doors was not built to win a hackathon.

It was built because Europe keeps saying participation while hiding the first gate: language.

That line is the real beginning.

Not Brussels.

Not the event room.

Not the pitch logic.

The project existed before the hackathon because the problem existed before the hackathon.

Europe is full of language about inclusion, access, civic participation, democratic legitimacy, and public engagement.

Some of that language is sincere.

Some of it is procedural.

Some of it is ceremonial.

But all of it runs into the same earlier question:

who can actually read the message,  
respond to the message,  
enter the process,  
and be institutionally understood once they do?

That is the gate.

And too often it is treated as if it were only a cosmetic layer.

Translation can appear late.

Interface language can appear late.

Participation language can appear early while the real entry problem stays unresolved.

That is why 24 Doors matters to me.

The tool takes the twenty-four official EU languages and treats each one as a door.

Not a brand flourish.

Not a cute metaphor sitting on top of a generic app.

A real door.

A public message enters through one or more languages.

A threshold is chosen.

A target area stands on the other side.

And the tool asks a stricter question than translation software usually asks:

how much civic access does this message plausibly open?

That is different from asking whether a sentence can be converted into another sentence.

24 Doors is not mainly about linguistic equivalence.

It is about institutional legibility.

Who can read this?

Who can act on it?

Who can reply?

Who can treat it as a usable civic object rather than a wall of foreign text?

That is why the tool uses doors, stamps, archive slips, language codes, and returned letters instead of treating the result like a cheerful dashboard.

I did not want the interface to say:

look, another European score.

I wanted it to say:

this is a gate system.

The output can become a returned letter.

An access report.

A routed civic object.

That matters because the problem is infrastructural.

Language is not decoration added after the democratic system is already working.

Language is part of whether the system is working.

If the first public interface is unreadable, or only meaningfully usable by the already-fluent, then the exclusion begins before any app logic, consultation, or policy form claims to have started.

## **Why This Fits The Room So Well**

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That is one reason the Brussels timing felt so odd.

A room full of civic-tech language is supposed to be where this project belongs.

And it does belong there.

But not because it is a polished competition artifact.

Because it puts pressure on a familiar European contradiction.

Europe likes to talk as if participation begins when the citizen arrives at the platform.

Very often it begins earlier.

It begins at the door they are allowed to enter through.

This is also why the project should not be reduced to translation.

If someone hears “twenty-four languages” and thinks the point is multilingual UI, they are hearing only the outer shell.

The deeper point is about public access conditions.

Translation can be part of that.

It is not the whole thing.

A message can be translated and still remain institutionally thin.

A public process can offer language options and still quietly reward the already-confident entrant.

A participation surface can look inclusive while the real usable route remains narrower than the rhetoric.

24 Doors tests that narrower route.

It asks whether a message can travel as civic mail.

It asks whether the route is broad or narrow.

It asks whether the interface should say “yes,” “not yet,” or “manual review still required.”

That last part matters too.

The tool is stronger when it refuses false certainty.

It is better when it says the exact scenario is missing than when it performs smoothness it cannot justify.

That is another reason I find the hackathon fit slightly amusing.

Hackathon culture often rewards speed, elegance, visual clarity, and immediate explanation.

24 Doors has all of those outer properties.

But the part I trust most is the opposite of hackathon theater.

The caveat.

The threshold.

The boundary.

The refusal to overclaim.

The fact that language access is treated as a serious civic infrastructure question instead of a last-mile UX charm layer.

## **Not A Translation Trick**

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So yes, there is a joke here.

I arrived with something that almost looks too perfect for the room.

An EU-facing civic-tech tool.

Twenty-four languages.

A clear interface metaphor.

A democratic frame.

A report-like output.

It almost sounds engineered for applause.

It was not.

It was built because the underlying gap was too obvious to ignore.

Europe already has digital systems, forms, consultations, portals, rights language, and participation rituals.

What it often still lacks is a visible language gate model.

It lacks a way of making the first exclusion readable.

24 Doors is one attempt to make that gate visible.

Not as the final answer.

Not as proof that one small tool can solve a continental problem.

But as a clearer interface for a problem Europe should already have been treating as infrastructure.

That is the part I keep coming back to.

The project fits the room.

Almost too well.

And maybe that is not mainly a comment about the project.

Maybe it is a comment about the room.

If a small independent tool can make the first civic gate this visible, then the more uncomfortable question is why the gate stayed this invisible for so long.

24 Doors is not a finished answer.

It is a door system Europe should have had already.

The first civic interface is not the app.

It is the door people are allowed to enter through.

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#### RELATION MEMORY

NEARBY [Hedegreen Research Is Going to Brussels](#) · The earlier field-note about entering the Brussels civic-tech room.

NEARBY [Download Was the Wrong Door](#) · Shares the door-language correction around public tools and how they should be framed.

NEARBY [The Tool Learned to Say Not Yet](#) · Shares the principle that a public instrument becomes stronger when it shows limits instead of pretending certainty.

NEARBY [If the Data Exists, the Door Can Be Built](#) · Shares the idea that public systems need usable doors, not only hidden source layers.