

Dear reader,

Thank you for taking an interest in my work.

The Democracy Gap is the culmination of my life's work—it is my most comprehensive analysis of Ireland's citizen science & innovation landscape. This dossier documents my journey from being introduced to GIS & smartphones as a 1st year geography undergrad in 2008 through to its alignment with our national & international obligations in 2026.

Although many countries have a citizen science strategy, Ireland has no citizen science strategy to create meaningful utility from technology. Every day we are increasingly dependent on screens yet we have no plan except a few reactionary phone-pockets in schools or government surveillance to access the internet.

When I was a 1st year undergraduate student being introduced to GIS and Remote Sensing in 2008 the launch of the iPhone seemed like *a pretty big deal to me* which inspired me to pursue a career in geospatial science that I am continuing to work on today.

For years, working on OpenLitterMap evenings and weekends was incredibly challenging and rewarding. I learned a lot but eventually I burned out from financial burden and constant rejection to get the funding that I need to do the work and live a more balanced life.

Today, my workflow has been transformed by AI. Although it's far from perfect, the trajectory, transformation, and acceleration is exciting. This is enabling me to not only work, but multi-task—faster, better, and more creatively with significantly less mental exhaustion.

The Democracy Gap is an example of this. Although a lot of it is hand-written, AI helped me evaluate and structure my knowledge. My coding has also been transformed. Although it's far from perfect and you can often get trapped in *prompt hell* the creativity *vibe* potential it opens up is often much faster and more enjoyable than more deterministic programming which I still do but increasingly less so.

Ireland is a great country that I want to see succeed. Shaped by ocean and empire, we have overcome considerable odds to nurture some of the most incredible culture & people in the world. Although the state has inherited some significant structural problems I believe we can overcome them as the democracy gap is not built on solid foundations. Society is evolving through the use of digital systems and although there are problems, society has never had a more prosperous setup for education. As we are only at the beginning of the age of digital transformation we have a responsibility to evaluate our systems and create better ones. And although digital systems are incredibly powerful, we should not forget to take inspiration from the last surviving generation that will remember time before the internet

Social media transformed our relationship with information. No longer is there a strict government top-down monopoly on what can be shown on TV. The next iteration of this information revolution is the participatory production of empirical objective knowledge on pollution & biodiversity.

To mark the beginning of 2026, the year of Ireland's EU Presidency, I spent the 1st of January in Paris practicing my democratic citizenship—visiting [UNESCO](#) & [OCED](#) headquarters to personally deliver The Democracy Gap policy dossier with a LitterWeek concept note and invitation letter where I collected 100s of data points outside their buildings in minutes.

I look forward to seeing what our systems will do with this knowledge ahead of our Presidency.

Grma—
Seán