

DemocracyNext

Another Democratic Future is Possible

Across the globe, people lack agency to shape their destinies. Governance systems are failing to address hard, complex issues. And those in power are not accountable to their citizens. We want to change this.

DemocracyNext is an international foundation working to accelerate the spread of high quality, empowered, and permanent citizens' assemblies. We believe in a more just, joyful, and collaborative future, where everyone has meaningful power to shape their societies. We work to shift who has power and how we take decisions in government and in institutions of daily life like workplaces, schools, and museums.

Citizens' assemblies are brave spaces for creative problem solving, designed for exercising our collective intelligence, engaging with complexity, and finding common ground. At their heart are three key ideas – sortition (selecting decision makers by lottery), deliberation (collectively weighing evidence for shared decisions), and rotation (taking turns representing, and being represented by others).

Our hypothesis is that if people have greater agency in decision making, the ripple effects contribute to a thriving, resilient society of active citizens, where people have stronger trust in one another, a meaningful sense of belonging, and are less polarised. Citizens' assemblies lead to more legitimate and informed decisions, policies, and resource allocations.



Assembly Members at the SKD Museum Citizens' Assembly in Dresden, that DemocracyNext helped initiate and design, implemented by Nexus Institute, November 2023. The first citizens' assembly in a museum in the world. Photo: Vera Sachetti

Our work

Our values inform how we approach our work – with rigour, curiosity, in collaboration with others, and with an ambition to be visionary. We don't just tinker at the margins of the status quo. We seed the change we want to see. We strategically work in collaboration with others to support and grow the global deliberative democracy movement by:

01 Creating *infrastructure*

- We create the infrastructure needed to scale the number of people and organisations with the know-how to implement and facilitate citizens' assemblies.
- We collect data and good practices, create resources, frameworks, templates, and guidelines, and convene cross-sector networks.

02 Building *institutions*

- We engage with decision makers to establish citizens' assemblies as new institutions that lead to systemic change and shift power.
- We advise ambitious leaders across multiple fields – from cities to governments, cultural and financial organisations, to cooperatives and educational institutions. We are not a practitioner organisation; we build local practitioner capacity.

03 Experimenting with *innovations*

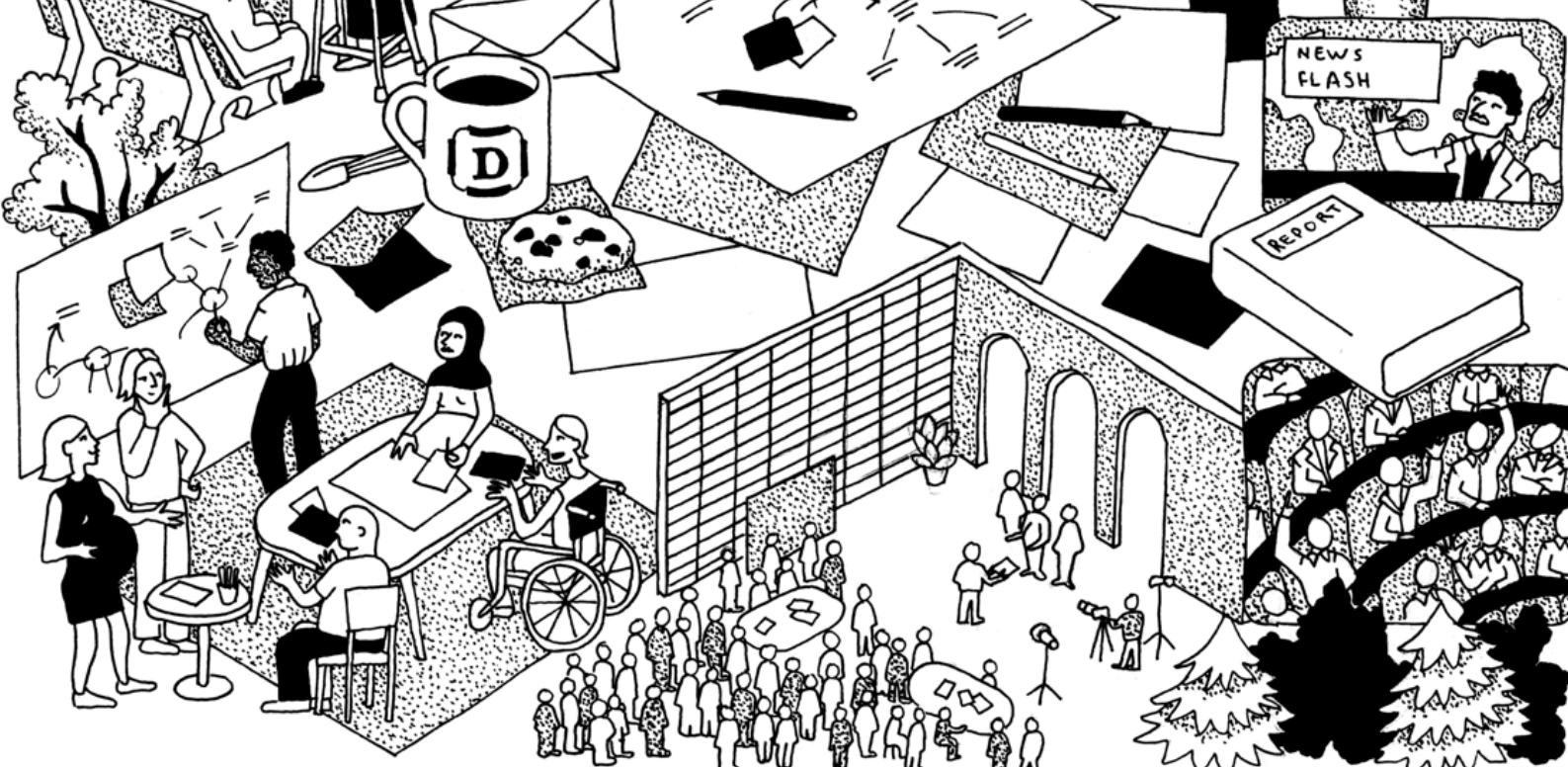
- We experiment and research innovations that push the boundaries of the field, improve quality and legitimacy, and accelerate the spread of citizens' assemblies. While we have evidence of 'what works', there are still many unanswered research questions and many innovations to be tried.
- We are also testing new ways to apply technology and AI before, during, and after citizens' assemblies.

04 *Inspiring* storytelling

- Creative storytelling that inspires people to learn and to act for another democratic future, powered by the stories of assemblies from around the world.
- We produce engaging videos and articles, speak at high-level conferences, and partner on exhibitions to reach decision makers and the wider public.

05 *Investing in* systemic change

- We invest in the enabling conditions for sustainable systemic change. We help decision makers to identify the teams and other infrastructure needed for ensuring that citizens' assemblies are sustainable.
- We invest in getting local civic hubs (in the language of systems change, these are sometimes called "systems orchestrators") off the ground.
- We know these hubs are helpful to connect elected and public officials, academia, civil society organisations, and other local community actors to enable network growth, learning, and local funding.
- So far our investments have been modest; we seek to scale these activities in the future.



Our goals for the next 3-5 years

Our top priorities are in blue.

01 *Infrastructure*

- Grow our infrastructure activities to [scale the number of people and organisations with the know-how](#) to run high-quality, empowered, and ongoing citizens' assemblies.
- Launch the [DemNext Platform](#) that turns our Assembly Guide into a dynamic and responsive website. Our goal is to reach 10,000 initial users.
- Map where [tech infrastructure](#) is needed to support citizens' assemblies, and partner to build and test it.
- Publish a [Deliberative Systems Impact Framework](#).
- Establish the DemNext Citizens' Assemblies Tracker to measure public awareness of and support for citizens' assemblies.
- Create a blueprint for the [legal infrastructure](#) needed for ongoing citizens' assemblies.
- Establish a Global Democracy Innovation Index that builds on the impact research and tracker activities. No democracy index to date includes information about citizens' assemblies with other metrics related to agency and polarisation. We seek to fill that gap and measure impact regularly and systematically.
- Translate the Assembly Guide and Platform to other key languages.

02 *Institutions*

- [Work with 2-3 'deliberative cities'](#), where there are ongoing citizens' assemblies in multiple institutions in the same place - city government, schools, universities, museums, etc. and research the impact of these changes.
- Continue supporting the spread of citizens' assemblies in non-governmental sectors - eg culture, education, workplace.
- Support decision makers and local practitioners to establish and run ongoing citizens' assemblies in cities.

Photo: Members of the permanent Paris Citizens' Assembly 2023-24 with Mayor Anne Hidalgo. They are the first in the world to draft a Citizen Bill that was adopted by a City Council. Our Founder is on the Oversight Committee and was involved in designing the assembly.

Photo credit: City of Paris.



03 *Innovations*

- Co-edited volume with leading academic David Farrell, who co-initiated the first Irish Citizens' Assembly, about the [lessons learned from the first years of embedding citizens' assemblies](#) (in progress).
- Research the implications for legitimacy and accountability of advisory and decision-making citizens' assemblies (in progress).
- Collaborative research on new approaches and applications in new sectors - children's assemblies, economic and financial institutions, schools, and universities.



„Unsere“ Demokratie “Our” Democracy

Der Wert Demokratie kommt aus der griechischen Sprache. Es bedeutet „die Macht des Volkes“. In deutscher Grammatik heißt:
„Die Überlegenheit geht von unten aus. Sie wird vom Volk in Wahlen und Referenden bestätigt.“
In Deutschland heißt das Volk der Parlament – das Nationalparlament. Der ist die Hauptversammlung der Interessen der BürgerInnen vertreten. Dieses System nennt sich repräsentative oder parlamentarische Demokratie. Für eine Demokratie ist es wichtig, wenn große Teile der Bevölkerung nicht repräsentiert werden. Das heißt es muss die Möglichkeit geben, dass Menschen ihre Interessen vertreten können! Wie kommt das? Wie wird das gemacht oder überlassen?
Manche Staaten setzen auf eine direkte Demokratie wie zum Beispiel Volksentscheidungen. Auch das kann zu Problemen führen. Zum Beispiel, wenn Menschen nicht ausreichend informiert werden. Demokratie bedeutet nicht Machtverteilung. sondern wie sie ausüben können wie den Menschenrechten verpflichtet.

The word democracy comes from the Greek language. It means rule by the people.
Democracy means:
“All state authority is derived from the people. It must be exercised by them through elections.”
In Germany, the people elect the parliament – politicians who are supposed to represent the different interests in the Bundestag. This is called a representative democracy or parliamentary democracy.
Representation – that means, the representation of the will of the people by elected representatives – is very important. It is an important part of the political system. If not, democracy is not a democracy. It is often a crisis of representation. Which interests are represented – and who is not? That is the question.



Our Founder Claudia Chwalisz meeting President Barack Obama at the Obama Leaders gathering in Athens, 2024. Photo: Obama Foundation; All in! Redesigning democracy exhibit at Germany’s National Art Museum, May 2024. Photo: Markus Miessen

04 Inspiration

- Establish a [global network of former assembly members](#), in partnership with key players in the field
- Establish the DemNext Community. We are currently engaging around 12,000 people; our goal is to exponentially grow this group to 50,000.
- Establish a Stories of Assemblies feature on our website and newsletter to consistently report on assemblies worldwide and the impact they are having on people and policies.
- Collaborate with a high-profile arts institution on a citizens’ assembly and/or exhibition.
- Establish an engaging podcast / YouTube channel.

05 Investment

- [Have completed the groundwork for exploring whether and how we should get set up as a funder](#) that catalyses systemic change with citizens’ assemblies.
- Advise funders on their investments in citizens’ assemblies.
- Work with funders to better understand their needs and challenges.
- Establish criteria and a process for selecting funding projects that link up to our research and metrics.

Highlights from our first 2 years



[Launch](#) with 600+ international participants

*September
2022*



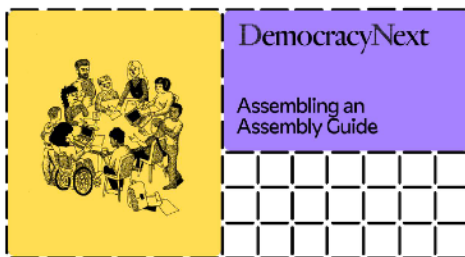
[NY Times Athens Democracy Forum Opening Provocation](#)



[World's first citizens' assemblies in museums](#) in Bonn and Dresden

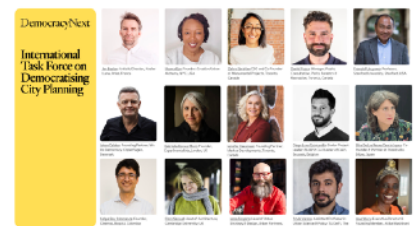


[Speech at UN Forum on Human Rights, Democracy & the Rule of Law](#)



[DemNext Assembly Guide](#) launch

*September
2023*



[International Task Force on Democratising City Planning](#)



MIT CCC x DemNext [Tech-Enhanced Student Assembly](#)

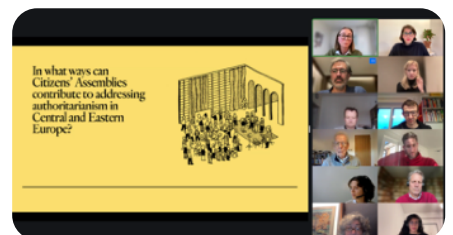


[Cities programme](#) kicks off with Esch-sur-Alzette, Kerewan & Vilnius



[Deschutes, Oregon Civic Assembly on Youth Homelessness](#)

*September
2024*



[Paper on citizens' assemblies as an antidote to authoritarianism in CEE](#)

World-leading expertise in democratic innovation and systems change

Our team is made up of renowned experts who have created global standards, established comparative datasets and metrics, and created accessible resources that enable the field to grow and learn. We work very closely with our [Board and International Advisory Council](#), who have a wealth of experience in government, academia, running companies and non-profits, venture capital, culture, and other sectors.



Our Founder [Claudia Chwalisz](#) was involved in designing the world's first permanent citizens' assemblies and previously established the OECD's work on innovative citizen participation. Together with Founding Senior Advisor Ieva Cesnulaityte, they analysed an evidence base of over 700 examples of deliberative assemblies around the world, co-authored the "Catching the Deliberative Wave" report, and set standards for implementation and institutionalisation - resources that are used and cited around the world.



Our Chief Operating Officer [Lucy Reid](#) has extensive experience in senior director and operations roles in the culture sector. She was previously Assistant Director at the National Trust, Europe's largest conservation charity, leading large, interdisciplinary teams and with accountability for multi-million-pound operational and programme budgets. She was a national lead on inclusion and the Trust's urban strategy. She is an experienced non-executive director and charity chair.

Support our mission

We seek endowed, project, and core support for DemNext from foundations and individuals who understand the systemic, long term nature of our work and who share our ambitious mission and vision for another democratic future with citizens' assemblies. We are seeking funding that supports our mission and team to carry out its advocacy work, develop new research and impact metrics, tell more engaging stories that inspire, and strategically invest in systemic change.



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