

Shifting Power and Scaling Deliberation in Lasting Ways, With and Beyond AI

Impact Report 2025

Another democratic future is possible.

DemocracyNext

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Foreword

DemocracyNext stands at the forefront of a growing movement to build a new approach to decision making in the common interest.

At a time when authoritarian forces are trying to centralise power and deepen divisions between people, we are doubling down our efforts to broaden who has power, and show that it's possible to govern in the common interest across partisan divides. We champion sortition, deliberation, and rotation – the foundations of self-governance, now being rediscovered and put to work in citizens' assemblies around the world.

2025 was our third year. Several threads of our work came together – the conversation about technology, artificial intelligence, and democracy moved from the margins to the centre – and we were there, helping to shape it rather than react to it. We launched a network, wrote and published research, convened the field, and pushed the agenda that is at the frontier of some of the biggest questions facing our societies.

At the same time, our work to build lasting institutions deepened: in Birmingham, Deschutes, Vilnius, in Esch-sur-Alzette, and Kerewan, and in the cooperatives of Mondragon, we have been laying foundations and sowing seeds for the years ahead.

The mood of the moment makes this work more urgent, not less. The 'triple trust' dilemma – where people's trust in institutions, institutions' trust in people, and people's trust in one another are all alarmingly low – is real. But we see it as an opportunity as much as a problem.

We have a leapfrog moment: a chance to build democracies people can be excited about, rather than simply defending a status quo that is failing them.

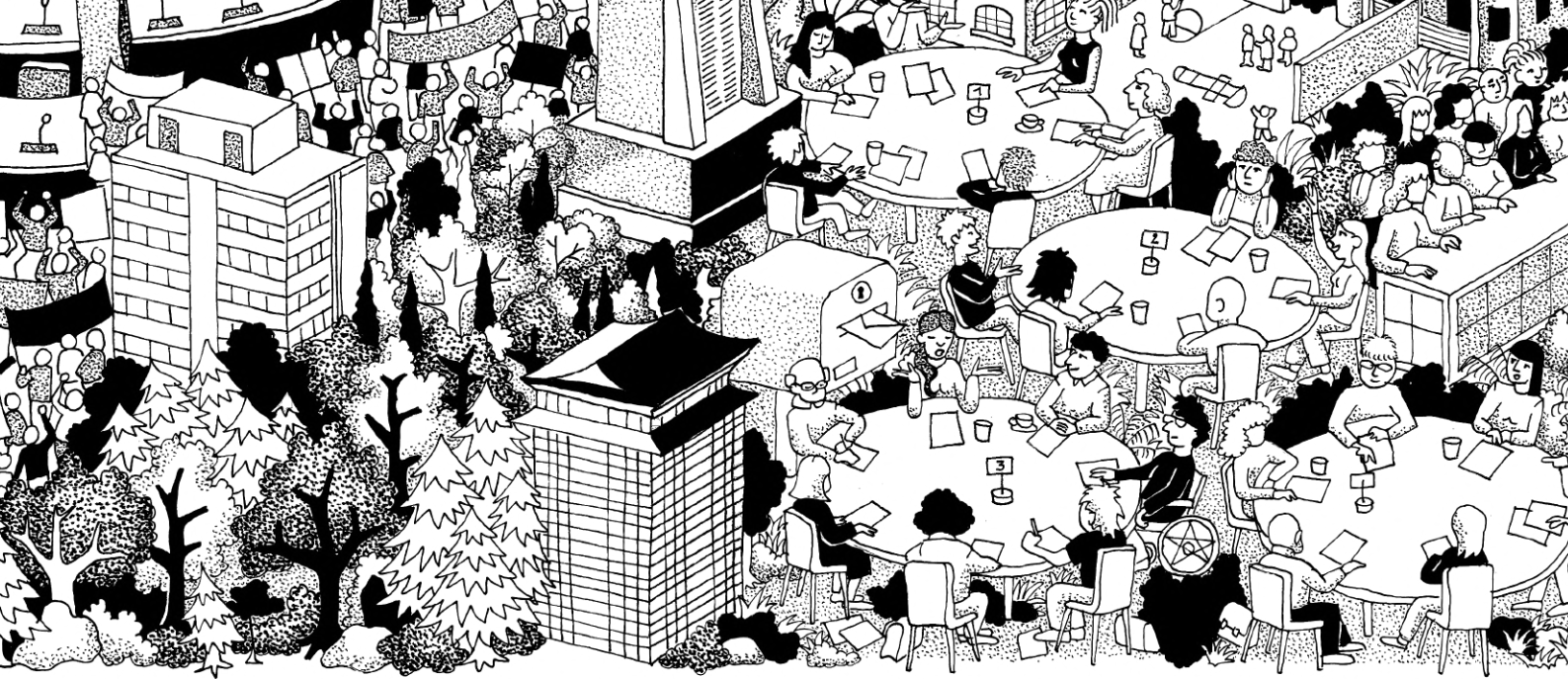
We are proud of what we achieved in 2025, and deeply grateful to our team, partners, collaborators, and supporters who made it possible. Together, we are building a more just, joyful, and collaborative future where people have meaningful power to shape the decisions that affect their lives.

Another democratic future is possible.

– **Claudia Chwalisz**, Founder & CEO, DemocracyNext



Claudia at the FARI Conference



About us

DemocracyNext is an international research & action institute focused on broadening who has power and enhancing how we make decisions together.

We champion three democratic practices – *sortition* (choosing decision makers by lottery), *deliberation* (structured collective decision making), and *rotation* (taking turns to represent and be represented) – that together make democracy more legitimate, more trustworthy, and more effective.

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. Sortition-based deliberations, like citizens' assemblies, lead to more legitimate and informed decisions, policies, and resource allocations.

Our values

DemocracyNext's 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.

About citizens' assemblies

Citizens' assemblies are brave spaces for creative problem solving – for public policies, legislation, or tough organisational decisions. They are designed for exercising our collective intelligence, engaging with complexity, and finding common ground.

Also known as civic assemblies, deliberative mini-publics, or citizens' juries, at the heart, all embody three principles: sortition (selecting decision makers by lottery, or random selection), deliberation (collectively weighing evidence for shared decisions), and rotation (taking turns representing, and being represented by others).

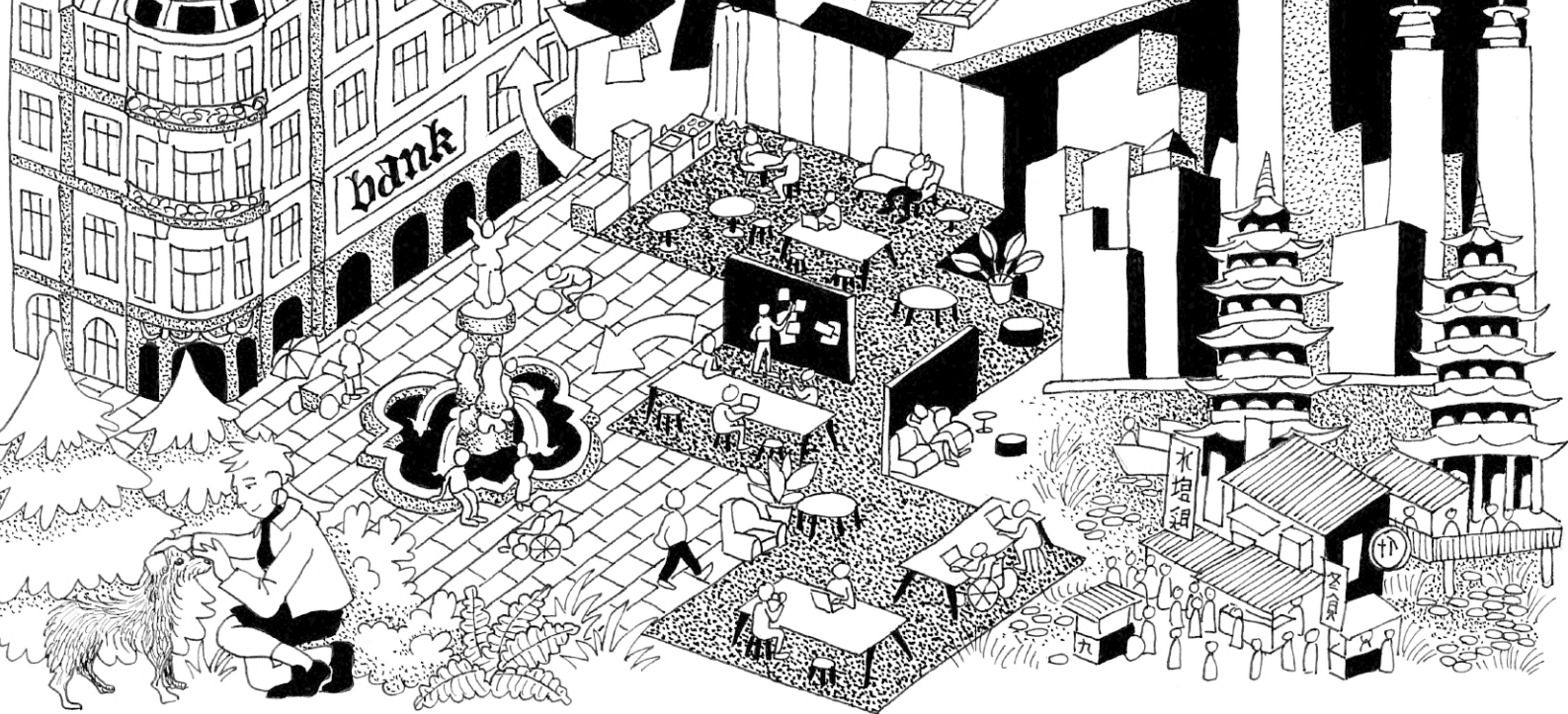


Cover of the Japanese translation of our *Assembling an Assembly Guide*

A citizens' assembly can range in size from roughly 20-200 people. Selected at random from a community or nation, they ideally have a mandate from a public authority, which can be a government entity or the leaders of a museum, school, university, or other institution. Assemblies typically meet for at least 5-6 days over a significant period of time (usually 3-6 months). Assembly members are compensated for their time, and are supported by a team of specialist facilitators who are brought in to lead the process, and ensure the citizens are well supported. They hear from a breadth and diversity of experts on the topic, including those with personal experience; they deliberate on possible policy fixes in small, usually facilitated groups; and they vote to see which ideas win supermajority approval, then propose these ideas as a package to the mandating authority.

Since the first modern citizens' assembly was held in British Columbia, Canada in 2004, more than [700 citizens' assemblies](#) have been held worldwide. Some achieve notable success, like breakthroughs on [abortion and same-sex marriage in Ireland](#). Their numbers have been [snowballing](#) since the late 2010s.

→ Learn more in DemNext's [Assembling an Assembly Guide](#)



Our vision

Imagine political headlines aren't filled with campaigning soundbites, stories about corrupt political financing, or it taking months and months to form government coalitions. Imagine if what mattered in politics was citizens - people with no political career ambitions - getting together to do the hard work of figuring out how to collectively solve the problems facing their families, neighbourhoods, schools, cities, regions, and countries.

Entire places buzzing with groups of citizens from all walks of life – activated and transformed after their lucky lottery selections – deliberating together on different decisions.

Deliberation instead of debating clubs in schools. Student councils chosen by sortition rather than popularity contests, with power rotating, and young people sharing power from an early age.

Academics, staff, and students coming together to make decisions affecting the future of universities. About use of AI, environmental policies, diversity and inclusion, free speech, and other values-driven, political decisions that affect them all.

Local residents working with museum directors, staff, and curators to make culture something for everybody. Making people feel part of the places they live. Contributing as citizens.

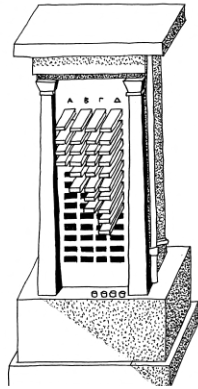
In places all over the world, people flexing their civic muscles. Feeling heard and empowered. Their agency awakened. Three-way trust rebuilt. Society's democratic resilience stronger than ever.

Pockets of this vision are already a reality in some places.

For this vision to become reality more widely, we need more people to know: what these democratic methods are; how effective they can be; how to implement them; and how to make them permanent features of institutional decision making, not just one-off initiatives.

Three pillars of our work: *Spreading the ideas, enabling the practice, and embedding the power*

We work strategically and in collaboration with others to support and grow the global deliberative democracy movement through three interconnected approaches:

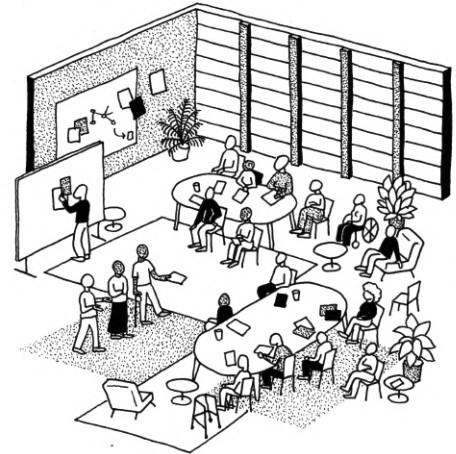


01 Spreading the ideas

Making sortition, deliberation, and citizens' assemblies widely known and wanted
We engage in creative storytelling and advocacy that inspires people to learn about and champion another democratic future, powered by real stories from around the world.

02 Enabling the practice

Making it easy to implement and innovate with these democratic methods
We create the tools, guides, and resources needed to help people and organisations implement deliberative processes using sortition, whilst experimenting with and researching innovations that improve quality, enhance legitimacy, and accelerate their spread.



03 Embedding the power

Embedding these democratic methods as permanent features of decision making
We are a scaling catalyst for sustainable, democratic systems change. This means that we advise ambitious leaders across multiple sectors to establish deliberative processes using sortition as new institutions that lead to systemic change and shift power. Our future ambitions involve becoming a funder that invests in local and regional scaling catalysts that scale this new vision of democracy.

Find out more about how to [collaborate with us](#) or [donate](#) to support our mission.

2025 — The year deliberation, technology, and AI gathered steam

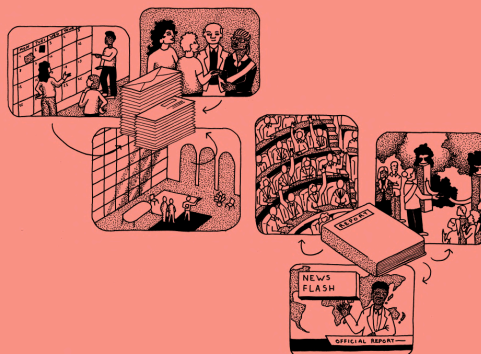
2025 was the year the question of how technology and AI will shape – or undermine – our democratic futures truly gathered steam, and DemocracyNext was at the heart of driving that agenda. We did not wait to see how the field would develop; we helped to convene, define, and shape it.

We launched the [Deliberation & Technology \(DelibTech\) Network](#). Co-convened with the [AI & Democracy Foundation](#), the DelibTech Network is an invite-only international community of technologists, practitioners, and experts who are building, studying, and using technology to enhance deliberation and to create digital infrastructure for deliberative democracy. Its members span leading labs, universities, and practitioner organisations across continents. We held a first virtual convening in September 2025 to launch the network, followed by an in-person gathering on 14 October 2025 to map applications across the ecosystem, and identify where the gaps and risks lie. The network exists to guide technological innovation around a critically-informed repertoire of deliberative technologies, to develop principles and protocols for deploying them responsibly, and to enable mutual learning across a field that has, until now, been fragmented.

We published research that frames the debate. Our paper [Five Dimensions of Scaling Democratic Deliberation: With and Beyond AI](#) set out a holistic framework for what 'scaling' really means – scaling out (more people), up (higher levels of governance), across (more processes), deep (greater impact), and in (higher quality) – arguing that meaningful scaling is never a technological challenge alone. We continued developing our thinking on what 'deliberative technologies' actually are, and where their trade-offs lie, laying the groundwork for a paper on 'scaling catalysts' that we launched in early 2026, and a forthcoming paper on 'deliberative muscles & AI' (out in July 2026). Read [all our papers on AI & deliberation](#).

Five dimensions of scaling democratic deliberation:

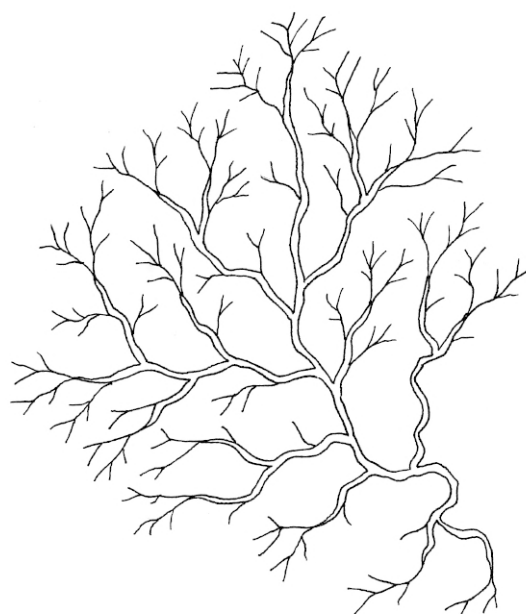
With and beyond AI



17 June 2025

Sammy McKinney (University of Cambridge and DemocracyNext) and Claudia Chwalisz (DemocracyNext)

DemocracyNext





We explored shared infrastructure for the field. With NYU's GovLab, we began exploring the options for a **Deliberation Data Commons** – a way to make data from deliberative processes securely available to researchers, technologists, and the public, so the whole field can keep improving its practice.

We convened the conversation, and challenged it. Throughout 2025, we used our growing platform to push for a more ambitious vision of public power over technology:

At the **FARI AI Conference** in Brussels (November 2025), Claudia challenged the tendency to treat citizen engagement as a box-ticking exercise in technology governance, arguing that [public deliberation cannot be an afterthought](#) – it must be embedded from the outset, sharing agenda-setting power rather than rubber-stamping decisions that have already been made. [Watch her talk here.](#)



At **Innovate(US)'s Reboot Democracy** series (October 2025), curated by Danielle Allen of the Allen Lab for Democracy Renovation at Harvard Kennedy School, [Claudia explored how AI can be thoughtfully integrated into citizens' assemblies](#) while remaining grounded in legitimacy, inclusion, and shared power.

Claudia returned to the **Denizen podcast** in summer 2025 to discuss [how AI can help scale deliberative democracy](#) that is more resilient to autocracy – and what aspects of deliberation are fundamentally, irreplaceably human.

This is the ground we will keep building on in 2026 and the years that follow.

“DemocracyNext is at the cutting edge of thinking and practice on democracy and technological innovation. Their papers and events are an important source of ideas, information, and calls to action.”

– Bruce Schneier, Fellow and Lecturer in Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School, co-author of "Rewiring Democracy: How AI Will Transform Our Politics, Government, and Citizenship"

"The DelibTech Network matters because it holds together two things that usually drift apart: the rigour of deliberative practice and the pace of technological change. Having a community that can think carefully about both, in real time, is exactly the kind of infrastructure democracy needs right now."

– Audrey Tang, Taiwan's Cyber Ambassador, International Advisory Council, DemocracyNext, and Member, DelibTech Network



"Deliberation and technology are on a collision course. This group helps me see where that leads, what to watch for and what's actually possible. I leave every time thinking differently."

- Nicole Hunter, Director, Mosaic Lab and Member, DelibTech Network

The DelibTech Network's cross-disciplinary composition makes it a unique place for technologists and deliberative practitioners to converge. By bringing these groups together, people and organizations that are passionate about democracy can share the latest research, observed trends, and personal experiences for how and where technology can augment deliberative processes and support democratic renewal.

– Kris Rose, AI Transformation, IBM, and Member, DelibTech Network



**The Case for
Local and
Regional
Public
Engagement in
Governing
Artificial
Intelligence**

Dr. Stefaan Verhulst (Co-Founder of The GovLab and The DataTank) and
Claudia Chwalisz (Founder and CEO of
DemocracyNext)



THEGOVLAB

DemocracyNext

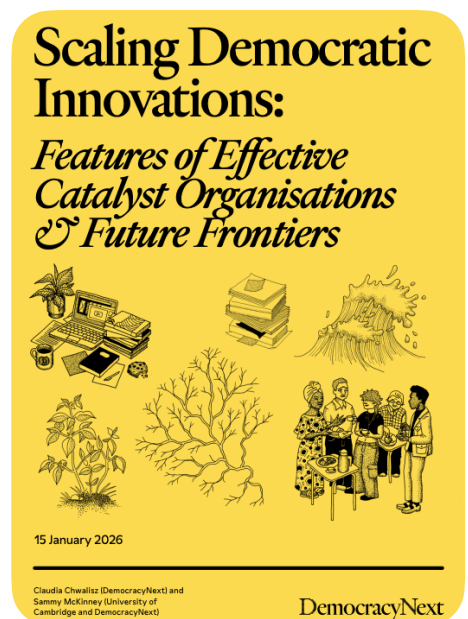
Catalysing new institutions: From pilots towards permanence

The deepest part of our work is the patient, relational, strategic work of building institutions that last – and of helping others become **scaling catalysts** in their own contexts. A one-off assembly, as David Van Reybrouck puts it, is like a single healthy meal: better than nothing, but not a healthy lifestyle. Lasting change comes from embedding these practices, and from cultivating the local ecosystems that can sustain them.

Naming what makes this work possible. Drawing on 22 in-depth interviews across nine leading deliberative democracy organisations on three continents, we wrote our [Scaling Catalysts paper](#) – worked on through 2025 and published at the start of 2026 – which identifies six features that distinguish organisations that successfully spread democratic innovations. It argues that we have not arrived at this inflection point by accident: we are here because dedicated organisations did the strategic, relational, and capacity-building work that makes scaling possible. This is the hidden infrastructure of the movement, and it deserves recognition and investment.

Birmingham: From a first citizens' jury towards a business plan. In January 2025, the recommendations of [Birmingham Museums Trust's \(BMT\) citizens' jury – the first in any UK museum](#), which we supported as a critical friend – were unveiled to local and national stakeholders. Throughout 2025, BMT continued to meet with jury members to report back on progress, and the jury's 20 recommendations have become a cornerstone of the Trust's wider transformation into a resilient, financially sustainable organisation. What began as a single deliberative moment is now shaping the institution's long-term plan.

Deschutes: An assembly that is leading to institution building. In Central Oregon, the [Deschutes Civic Assembly catalysed the creation of COCAP](#) (the Central Oregon Civic Action Project), now fiscally sponsored by the non-partisan Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council. With cross-partisan credibility and institutional reach, COCAP has become a learning site for civic leaders from across Oregon and the wider US – a vivid example of how one assembly can seed lasting civic infrastructure.



Images: p11-13 – BMT wins Museums Association award; Deschutes Civic Assembly; Katcha Network; Lucy speaking at the World Cities Culture Summit; at Mondragon with our friends from Arantzazuab and Deliberative; Esch and Vilnius assemblies; Team DemNext in-person catch up



Cities Programme: Foundations laid in Vilnius, Esch, and Kerewan. Across 2025, our flagship [programme](#) moved from design into delivery. The [North Bank Region Citizens' Assembly](#) in Kerewan, The Gambia, brought together 30 randomly-selected citizens – farmers, teachers, business owners, and students – from over 20 villages to deliberate on climate resilience and environmental restoration in their local languages, producing recommendations that won strong support from local leaders. In [Vilnius](#), Lithuania, the municipality is now working through implementation and considering how an assembly could be mandated as part of its strategic planning. In [Esch-sur-Alzette](#), Luxembourg, where the assembly ran into mid-2026, we co-organised a workshop bringing in practitioners from the Belgian and French permanent assemblies to help design an institutionalised model. Each assembly was independently evaluated in partnership with a local academic institution, and each has begun to seed a local ecosystem of practitioners, advocates, and experts, including the formalisation of the [Katcha Network](#) for deliberative democracy across Africa. A full report sharing these learnings follows in 2026.



Mondragon: Sowing seeds in the democratic economy. In 2025, we began an exciting collaboration with Mondragon, the MIT Center for Constructive Communication, and Arantzazulab to explore how the principles behind citizens' assemblies – sortition, deliberation, and rotation – can be applied to [cooperative decision making and governance](#). Mondragon is one of the world's largest cooperative groups, and this work asks a frontier question: how do we democratise not just our governments and cultural institutions, but our economies? The groundwork laid in 2025 sets up experiments in Mondragon's cooperatives in 2026–27.



“DemocracyNext is doing vital work – not just through hands-on efforts to build deliberative democratic structures around the world, but through their role as thought leaders advancing the field. They are an indispensable resource for cutting-edge thinking on democratic innovation.”

– Jenny Stefanotti, Founder & Steward, Denizen



“Democracy Next is at the forefront of innovation in making our democracies more dynamic, inclusive, and empowering.”

— Alice Rawsthorn, OBE, British design critic, author of *Design as an Attitude*, and International Advisory Council Member, DemocracyNext



“DemNext has quickly earned its place as a global reference for democratic innovation through deliberative processes. Combining research, practice, and advocacy, DemNext offers a distinctive voice to critically and constructively address the challenges that democracies face around the world. I am particularly impressed by their increasing attention to the need to democratise our economies, and the role that deliberative democracy can play in that key frontier to build stronger democratic societies.”

— Oliver Escobar, Professor and Chair of Public Policy and Democratic Innovation, University of Edinburgh



“DemNext recognizes that citizens’ assemblies are not an end in themselves, but a foundation for impact — ensuring that participation translates into sustained, responsive, and legitimate governance.”

— Stefaan G. Verhulst, Co-Founder, The GovLab & The Data Tank, Professor, NYU



What's next...

If 2025 was about catalysing new institutions, our work ahead is about raising the level of ambition – asking how far these ideas can really go.

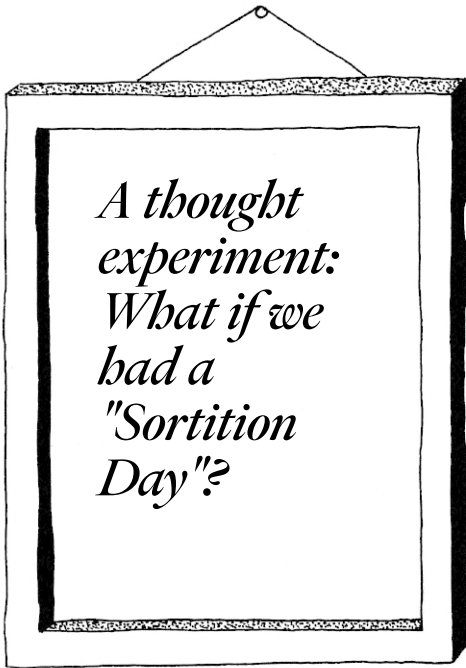
From recommendations to legislation. In July 2024, the Paris City Council adopted a Citizen Bill on Homelessness drafted by the permanent Paris Citizens' Assembly – the first time a major political body passed legislation written by a citizens' assembly directly into law. In 2025 we reflected on what made this possible, in a research essay examining the assembly's collaborative drafting process, in which citizens, politicians, and civil servants co-constructed the bill "to the comma". The model's one-year accountability review fell in July 2025. [Paris shows what becomes possible](#) when implementation is designed from the start.



What's the next level of ambition? Our projects have been demonstrating different pathways to shifting power and transforming decision making in ongoing ways. Birmingham Museums have moved directly from a first citizens' jury towards a business plan - winning multiple sector awards. Parisian citizens drafted a Citizen Bill passed by the Council. In Central Oregon, Esch, and Vilnius, pathways to establishing citizens' assemblies as new institutions are being explored in various ways. These are different routes to the same destination: power that genuinely shifts.

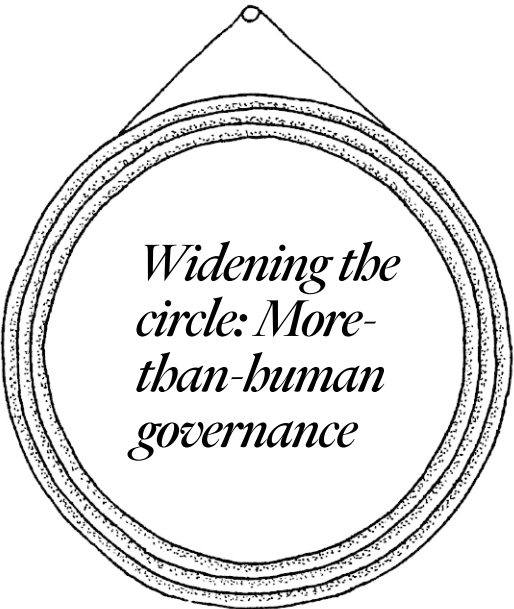
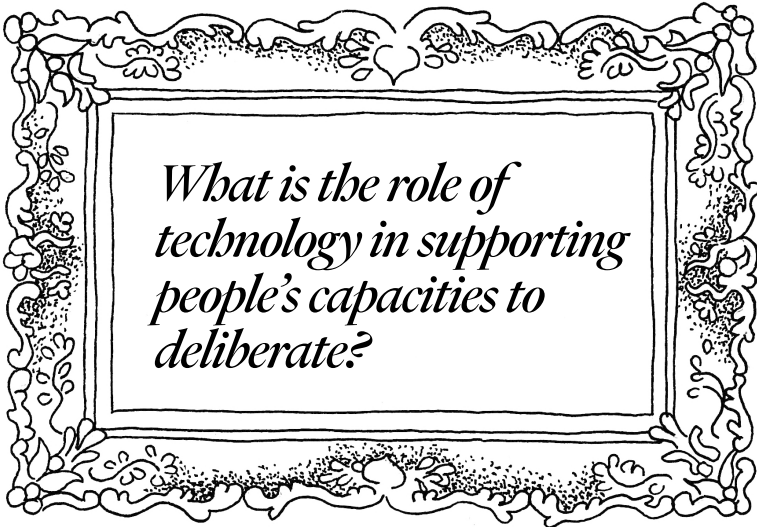
But we keep asking ourselves whether even this is enough – and what the more radical tests of the idea might look like. And how we might scale this work much faster.

The *questions* we are exploring



Imagine, instead of an election day, a day on which sortition-based bodies were constituted – citizens chosen by lottery to take on real decision making power, with rotation built in. What would it look like, in practice, to replace electoral institutions with sortition-based ones rather than running them alongside? Where would technology fit, and where must deliberation remain irreducibly human? We don't have all the answers, but these are precisely the questions worth provoking – and they connect directly back to the scaling catalyst work, tying together the threads of institution-building, technology, and a genuinely new democratic paradigm.

As AI capabilities continue to grow at an eye-watering pace, we are keeping up with these advances and are curious to keep exploring and laying out our normative view on how technology could support people's 'deliberative muscles'. Another question we'll be delving into is how does designing with technology in mind from the get-go change the traditional citizens' assembly approach?

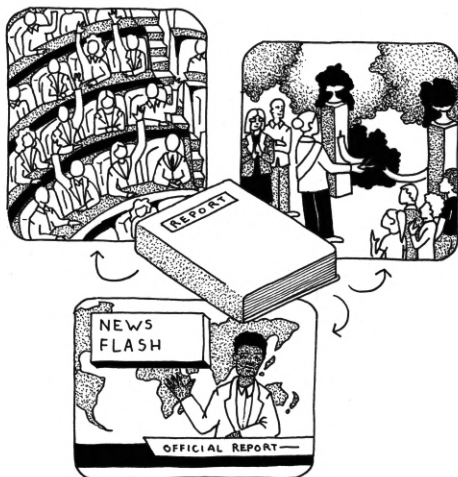
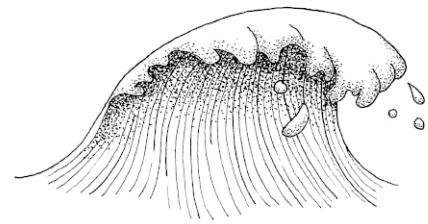


One of the biggest questions we carry forward is how decision making might meaningfully account for our relationship with the living world. Building on our exploratory mapping and convening work with Arising Quo in 2024, in January 2026 we launched [Including the More-than-Human in Decision Making](#) with the University of Sydney – a two-year project to inventory existing methods, run two original experiments, and support a global community of practice. It is among the most generative open questions we are sitting with: who, and what, gets a voice in the decisions that shape our shared future?

Where we are heading? — Our Phase 2.0 strategy organises this ambition around the *three pillars of our work*

01 Spreading the ideas

Creative storytelling and advocacy, including an Assembly Voices Network of former assembly members – the most credible messengers this movement has.



02 Enabling the practice

The Assembly Commons – an open-access knowledge hub building on our *Assembling an Assembly Guide*, read over 30,000 times, including databases about assemblies around the world, and a *Deliberation Data Commons*.

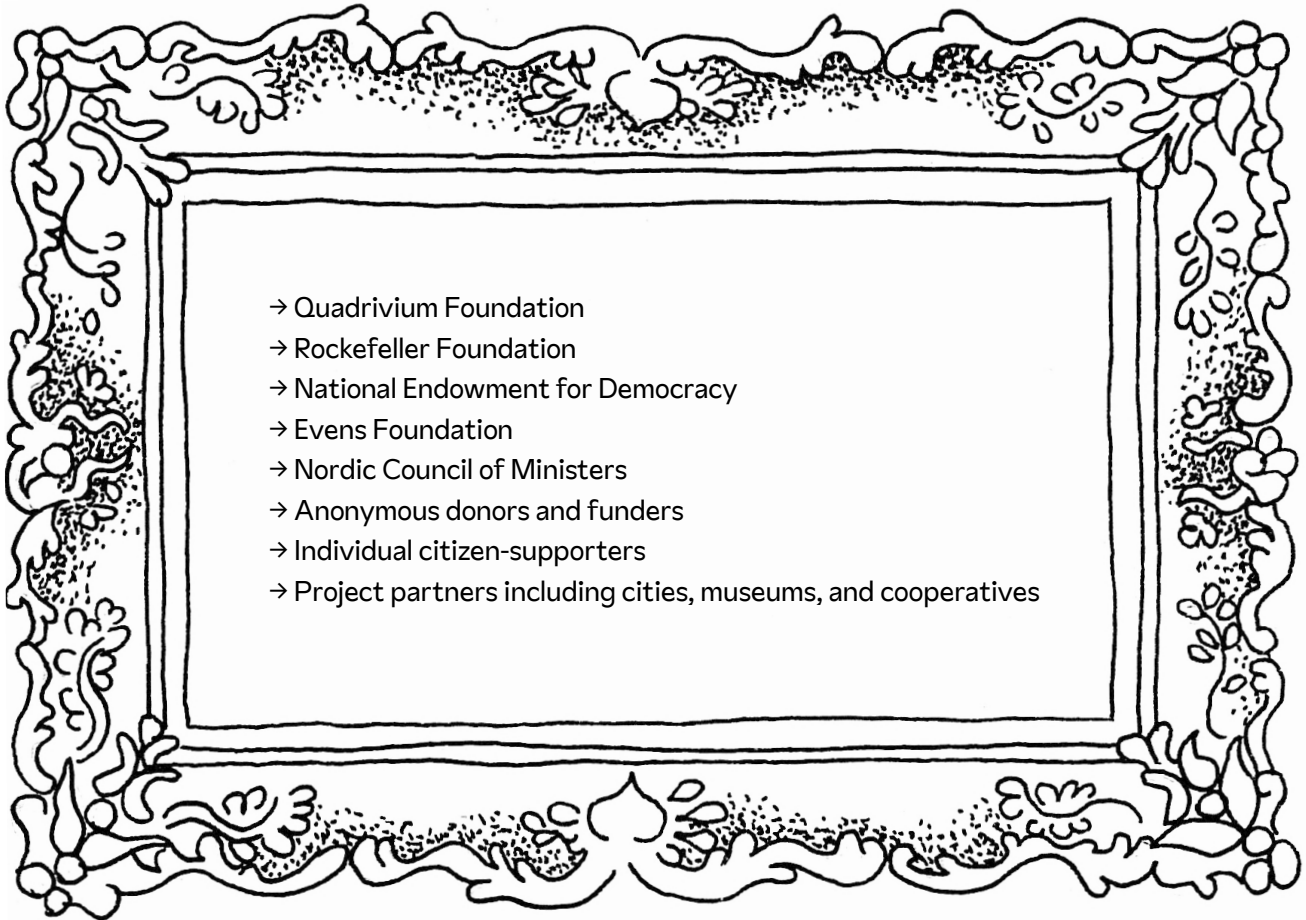
03 Embedding the power

Working with ambitious leaders to establish permanent, institutionalised assemblies, including a first dedicated physical space for an institutionalised assembly. Our forthcoming co-edited book, *Anchoring Deliberative Institutions* (De Gruyter, 2026/7), will gather the field's learning on what makes these institutions last. Our goal is to become a catalytic funder ourselves, drawing on the deep insights from our experience and research about what's effective for spreading these ideas and practices sustainably.

These are the big questions 2025 left us with. We intend to spend the coming years exploring them – with rigour, curiosity, in collaboration with others – and with the ambition to be genuinely visionary.

With thanks and appreciation

DemocracyNext is grateful for support from a wide range of foundations, funders, and individuals who have made our work this year possible:



We are also appreciative of those individuals who support us, whether through a monthly pledge on our [Substack newsletter](#), or as philanthropists convinced of the need to help us forge this new way out of the crisis in democracy.

→ If you would like to support our work financially, please contact [Claudia Chwalisz](#) or [Lucy Reid](#).

Thank you to our 2025 project partners & collaborators



2025 financial statement

| | € |
|---------------------------------|----------------|
| INCOME | |
| Grants | 743,514 |
| Other income | 68,200 |
| Total operating income | 811,714 |
| Project costs | -184,235 |
| Gross margin | 627,479 |
| EXPENDITURE | |
| Employee benefits | |
| Wages and salaries | 107,449 |
| Social security contributions | 16,508 |
| Other employee benefits | 482,935 |
| Other operating expenses | |
| Accommodation costs | - |
| Office related expenses | - |
| General expenses | 35,585 |
| Total expenditure | 642,477 |
| Operating result | -14,998 |
| Financial income and expense | -7,040 |
| Result | -22,038 |

Foundation details

- Stichting DemocracyNext
- KVK 92237444 | RSIN 865949347
- Accounts prepared by Schipper & Paul, The Hague





Support our mission

We see a path to scaling the kind of investment in new democratic institutions and civic infrastructure that makes shifting power sustainable. The democratic innovations the world needs will not emerge from isolated pilots; they will grow from sustained, systemic investment in the people and organisations committed to making them real. If you're an ambitious philanthropist who wants to catalyse another democratic future, you can [donate to support our work](#).

If you would like to make a major gift, contact [Claudia Chwalisz](#).

Another democratic future is possible. Let's build it.

Get in touch:

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2511 CJ The Hague, Netherlands

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