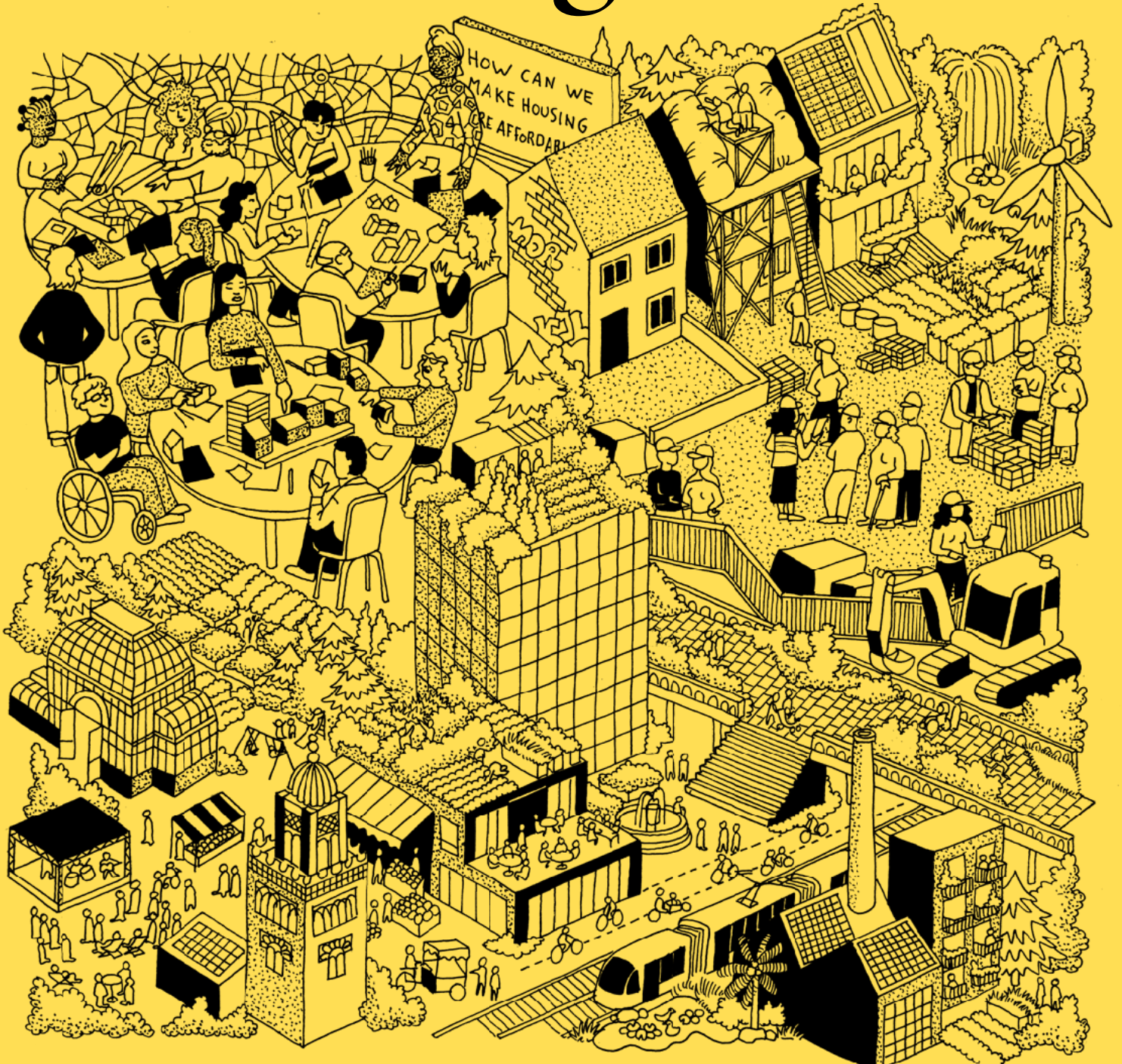# DemocracyNext Cities Programme

Overview

Claudia Chwalisz, CEO - claudia@demnext.org
Lucy Reid, COO - lucy@demnext.org
James Macdonald-Nelson, Project Lead - james@demnext.org

DemocracyNext

"There is something going on in the world right now. There is a hunger across the globe in political systems to get citizens involved in decision making and policy development. And citizens want to be involved in this role as well."

Art O'Leary, Chief Executive, Ireland Electoral Commission
Former DemocracyNext Advisory Council member

DemocracyNext is an international research & action institute focused on scaling high quality, empowered, and permanent citizens' assemblies.

Grounded in rigorous research and extensive practice in the field, we're both a knowledge hub and action lab on citizens' assemblies, deliberation, and sortition - the practice of selecting decision makers by lottery. We connect networks who share a goal of innovating democratic governance.

Our three focus areas are democratic infrastructure, institutions, and innovations.

Our work at DemocracyNext

01
Infrastructure - Building the field

→ We serve as a connector of knowledge and people to help the field of democratic innovation to grow and thrive.
→ We collect data and good practices, create resources, frameworks, and guidelines, and convene networks.
→ We work to seed and strengthen the democratic infrastructure necessary for sustainable change, scaling the number of people and organisations with the know-how to implement and facilitate deliberative assemblies through our learning programs and capacity building activities.

02
Institutions - Scaling systemic change

→ We provide technical advice and expertise on the design of institutionalised Assemblies that are more than one-offs and provide support for the relational and political work to ensure change is sustainable.
→ To us, Citizens' Assemblies are not just 'tools' that should complement elections. Our work is about building new institutions. We think the architecture of democracy needs to expand to include Assemblies with real weight and power.
→ We want to see empowered, decision-making Assemblies next.

03
Innovations - Enabling experiment-ation

→ While we have evidence of 'what works', there are still many unanswered research questions and many innovations to be tried and tested.
→ We are prototyping tech-enhanced deliberative assemblies.
→ We are exploring more-than-human governance approaches.
→ And we are expanding the core ideas of Citizens' Assemblies into other domains beyond government.

About DemNext's cities programme

We work with cities around the world who are interested in implementing new models for citizen engagement. Specifically, we focus our work on the contextualisation and implementation of Citizens' Assemblies in a systematic way to broaden and deepen citizen participation and deliberation in urban planning decision-making processes.

We tap into the knowledge and expertise of each city in order to adapt the general proposals outlined in DemocracyNext's paper, Six ways to democratise city planning: Enabling thriving and healthy cities.

Overview about how we work

→ DemocracyNext is not a practitioner organisation - part of our mission is to train and empower local organisations and and administration staff to have the skills and know-how to do this themselves.

→ We build capacity through a 3-stage learning program outlined in this document that is tailored to civil servants, decision makers, and planners to increase the knowledge and capacity of staff and decision makers to understand the elements of initiating and running a Citizens' Assembly. This is done virtually and in person.

→ We provide ongoing advice and guidance throughout implementation of the Citizens' Assembly by local partners.

→ We will provide opportunities for knowledge-sharing and learning between a cohort of cities.

→ We carry out research with local academic partners to evaluate and learn from the process of designing and implementing the Citizens' Assembly for future iterations and institutionalisation.

→ We promote the collaboration in order to inspire other cities globally.

→ We work with cities to determine the appropriate fee for collaborating with DemocracyNext and a cost estimate for a Citizens' Assembly that we determine through initial conversations.

Who we work with

→ Collaboration entails involvement from representatives from a mayor's office, elected councillors, public engagement teams, senior planners and heads of planning departments, and city managers.

→ We are also interested in hearing from motivated urban developers, civil society organisations, or heads of neighbourhood associations/ community boards who are interested in implementing these ideas. In these cases, it's important that political and administrative buy-in in the local municipality is fundamental.

Conditions for success

Political and administrative buy-in

→ Demonstrable commitment to the project from senior stakeholders and an openness from key decision makers to explore/experiment.
→ Ideally, cross-partisan support for the initiative from the government and opposition.
→ Commitment that decision makers will respond to the outputs of this collaboration and the Citizens' Assembly that takes place. Ideally, this commitment is from both the government and opposition, as well as senior leadership in the public administration. This is necessary for this initiative to be successful, not becoming politicised, and result in lasting change.

Available staff

→ A dedicated project manager. This person should be able to work with the key stakeholders; they must have sufficient time to lead and coordinate the city's involvement.

Strategic partners

→ This should include one or a group of organisations or people who will help deliver, advise, and collaborate on contextualisation and implementation of the proposal. This can include: an NGO/Civil Society Organisation with experience in citizen participation/deliberation or an explicit willingness to learn how to do this; an urban developer; an academic partner (a local university or college).

Time commitment

→ A nine-module learning program which will require regular meetings.
→ Regular check-in meetings with city contact points and strategic partners.
→ A minimum 18-24-month collaboration including documenting and learning from what works, and applying learnings to considerations for institutionalising Citizens' Assemblies.

Key questions

Below is a set of key questions that we discuss in introductory conversations:

1. What excites and inspires you most about a Citizens' Assembly in your city?
2. Please briefly explain what city planning or decision making problem you're tackling and why you think citizen deliberation would be a helpful solution.
3. How would this work fit into your city's strategic priorities?
4. How would you describe the commitment of the administration and the political leadership to carry out this work?
5. Briefly explain what competences and experience (if any) you/your team has with commissioning, overseeing, or implementing participatory or deliberative processes.
6. Is there an existing and available budget for citizen engagement or similar? If so, would you be able to tap into some of this to support this work?

How DemNext collaborates with cities

01 Learning & design

6-9 months

→ DemocracyNext will lead a learning and capacity-building program about Citizens' Assemblies for city staff, elected officials, and local practitioners (if needed). This typically entails multiple bilateral conversations with key stakeholders involved, followed by 5 virtual 2-hour sessions and a 1-2 day in-person workshop.

→ We will run a context-building/ knowledge-sharing workshop to understand the local context. This is typically one 2-hour workshop and is complemented with interviews of local stakeholders.

→ We will coordinate an issue-framing workshop if relevant, and an Assembly design workshop with relevant stakeholders and local actors. The issue-framing one is typically 1 day with follow-up meetings and asynchronous work to agree on wording. The design workshop is typically 2-3 days in person and necessitates follow-up meetings with relevant actors.

02 Implementation

6-12 months

→ DemocracyNext is not a practitioner organisation - part of our mission is to train and empower local organisations and and administration staff to have the skills and know-how to do this themselves. This is why the capacity-building phase is quite intensive.

→ We provide ongoing advice and guidance throughout implementation of the Citizens' Assembly by local practitioners. Our support for the local practitioners will depend on their level of expertise. DemocracyNext could organise additional ongoing support or mentorship by a trusted practitioner partner if needed.

→ We will coordinate knowledge-sharing and learning between the cities in the cohort and our wider international network.

03 Research & dissemination

3-6 months

→ DemocracyNext conducts research to learn from the experience.

→ We will partner with a local academic institution to conduct an evaluation.

→ We will create a webpage that has information about this collaboration and will write a paper that includes information about the process, the design, the implementation, and evaluation of learnings.

→ We will organise a workshop about the learnings for institutionalisation and iteration.

→ We will promote and disseminate activities and learnings through our international network and communications channels to inspire others, provide advice on iteration, and share research findings.

Benefits of participating in DemNext's international cities programme

→ Participate as part of an international cohort with other cities around the world to meet, build relationships, and learn from one another.

→ The DemocracyNext team works closely with their International Task Force on Democratising City Planning of interdisciplinary experts - architects, urbanists, chief city planners, public servants, practitioners, developers, investors, and civil society.

→ DemocracyNext draws on its ongoing collaborations with other organisations such as the MIT Center for Constructive Communication on Tech-Enhanced Citizens' Assemblies, as well as its strong academic links for research and evaluation partnerships.

→ DemocracyNext's team has been involved in designing all of the world's first institutionalised Assemblies, understanding the enabling conditions for success as well as bringing institutional design experience.

Learning & design timeline

The learning and design stage of the collaboration will take place June-December 2024. There are three elements to the programme. This is a provisional plan, to be discussed with each city and adapted to their needs and timelines.

Learning & design - 6-9 months

1) Kick-off and context-building

→ A visit by DemocracyNext to each city at the start of the collaboration to kick off the project, run a context-building workshop and meet with key local stakeholders. This might also be used as an opportunity to run the introduction module of the learning program in person.

2) A virtual learning program for Citizens' Assemblies in cities

→ A virtual learning programme for the cohort of cities that will provide the knowledge and skills to design and run a Citizens' Assembly.

3) Issue-framing and Assembly design workshops

→ A visit by DemocracyNext to each city to run issue-framing and Assembly design workshops with relevant stakeholders and local actors.
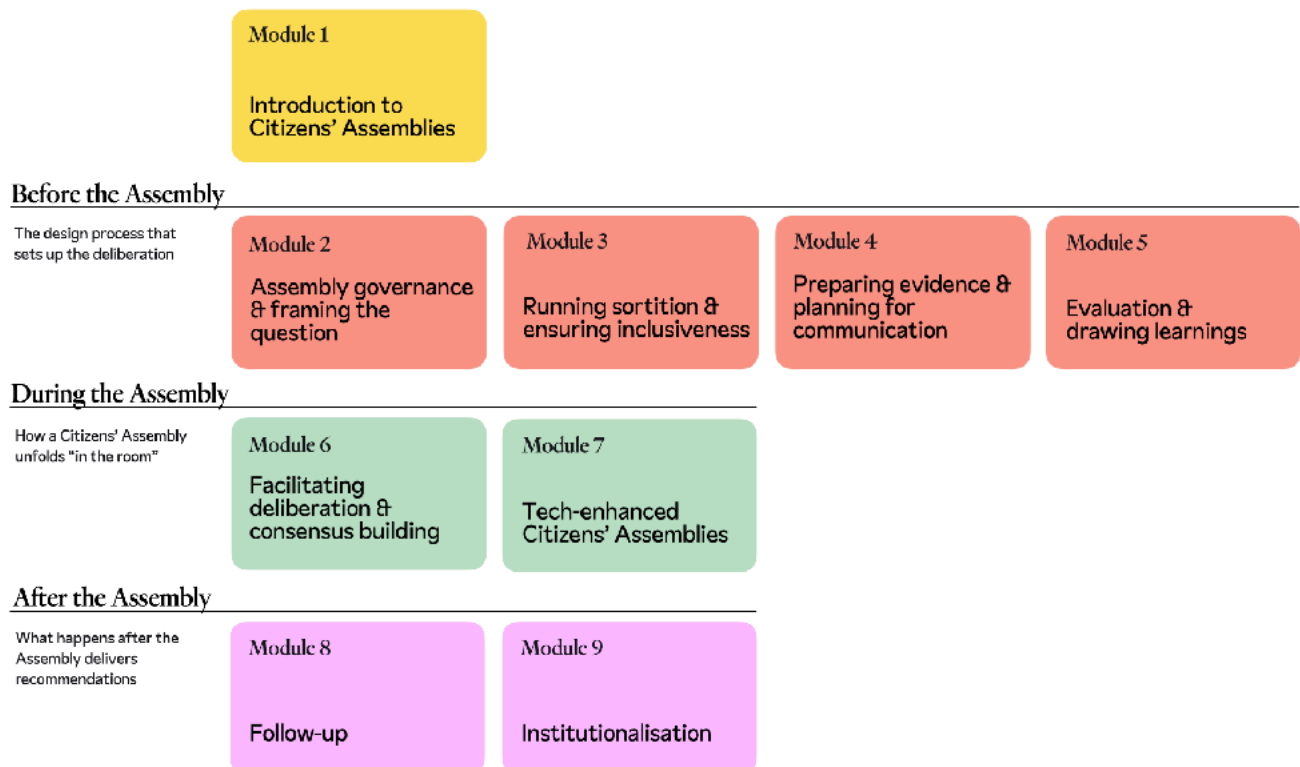
Implementation - 6-12 months

Research and dissemination - 3-6 months

A learning program for Citizens' Assemblies in cities

How does it work?

Based on our Assembling an Assembly Guide, we take relevant stakeholders in a city through a predominantly online learning programme that breaks down the steps of setting up an Assembly into nine learning modules. For each module of the program, we'll provide a comparative overview and will involve various practitioners from different parts of the world to provide additional examples and expertise. The virtual learning programme will take nine weeks to complete, and Zoom sessions for each week will include a Q&A session. We try to align the timing of this so that cities we are working with in different parts of the world will take the programme together and will have an opportunity to learn from each other.

Module 1

Introduction to Citizens' Assemblies

Before the Assembly

The design process that sets up the deliberation

Module 2	Module 3	Module 4	Module 5
Assembly governance & framing the question	Running sortition & ensuring inclusiveness	Preparing evidence & planning for communication	Evaluation & drawing learnings

During the Assembly

How a Citizens' Assembly unfolds "in the room"

Module 6	Module 7
Facilitating deliberation & consensus building	Tech-enhanced Citizens' Assemblies

After the Assembly

What happens after the Assembly delivers recommendations

Module 8	Module 9
Follow-up	Institutionalisation

Key learning objectives

By the end of the course, you will:

→ Understand the steps needed in designing, implementing, and following up on the recommendations of a Citizens' Assembly.
→ Understand how an Assembly fits into your city's context.
→ Have brought on board all the stakeholders needed to make the Assembly a success.
→ Have done the preparation work for the Assembly design workshop.

→ How we work: A case study

The following example shows how it is possible for one pilot to be scaled up to over 250 Assemblies in the space of three years, taking an approach to intentionally building capacity and skills collaboratively from the start.

Partnering with Arantzazulab Democracy Innovation Lab in the Basque country in Spain on a single pilot in Tolosa (a city of 20,000) in 2020, working in conversation with a second (separate) pilot at provincial level, has today led to reflections on how to institutionalise Citizens' Assemblies across all 251 local councils, three provincial governments, and the federal government. The proposals for this institutionalisation of Assemblies is happening despite a change in political leadership. This is because both the government and the opposition convened the Citizens' Assembly together and received its recommendations.

Our approach included in-depth strategy work, a broader capacity-building and a learning program involving the Arantazazulab team, representatives from all three layers of government, as well as civil society and practitioner organisations, from the get-go. We trained two local organisations with experience in adjacent activities such as community dialogues in how to design and run Citizens' Assemblies, and provided support and mentoring advice during the implementation phase. Today, the team at Arantzazulab is driving forward conversations, having developed the expertise to be able to do so with our support. We remain in contact to provide advice and answer questions when needed.

During 2024-25, we will again be partnering with Arantzazulab to work with a major international corporation to look at how to democratise their governance processes.

DemocracyNext team & experience

Our core team involved in any city project include:

Claudia was involved in designing the world's first permanent citizens' assemblies in Paris, Ostbelgien, and Brussels. With DemNext's Founding Head of Research and Learning, Ieva Česnulaitytė, she co-authored the OECD's flagship report Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave and led the development of the OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes. Claudia oversaw the development of the OECD Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes (2021) and wrote Eight Ways to Institutionalise Deliberative Democracy (2021). Claudia is an Obama Leader 2023 and she serves on the Advisory Boards of the UN Democracy Fund, The Data Tank, and Design & Democracy.

Claudia Chwalisz
Founder and CEO

James is a designer with degrees in landscape architecture, urbanism, and global development studies. Having studied and worked in spatial practice for 10 years in Toronto and then Berlin, mostly delivering large-scale commercial and residential development projects James has a deep knowledge of how the built environment is transformed, how decisions are made about our cities - and how often citizens are left out of these processes. At DemocracyNext, James is responsible for all things cities-related. This includes managing collaborations with cities around the world who have partnered with DemNext to broaden and deepen citizen participation and deliberation in urban planning decision-making processes - with citizens' assemblies playing a central role.

James MacDonald-Nelson
Project Lead - Urban Design and Planning

Lucy worked for 16 years at the National Trust - Europe's largest conservation charity. Initially as a General Manager, and then Assistant Director of Operations for the Midlands & East of England. Lucy was regional co-lead for all things inclusion, and the region's urban programme. She led the creation of the National Trust's first holistic city strategy in Birmingham, which included partnerships with community and arts organisations, local authorities, national and international heritage organisations, on a range of place-based and creative work all of which were about civic pride. As a volunteer she chairs Moseley Road Baths - a community-led place in Birmingham.

Lucy Reid
Chief Operating Officer

Hannah is a Programme Coordinator at DemocracyNext. She enjoys working at the intersection of research and practice, translating knowledge into action. She brings experience in communications and project management from her work with NGOs and government institutions across the United States, Europe, and Africa. Hannah has contributed to the INCLUDE Knowledge Platform, fostering equitable knowledge-sharing partnerships between African and European policymakers and experts. Her experience also includes projects on Wellbeing Economics in Policy and Practice and Connect for Global Change, an EU-funded initiative aimed at engaging youth on global challenges.

Hannah Terry
Programme Coordinator

Contact

Claudia Chwalisz, CEO - claudia@demnext.org
James Macdonald-Nelson, Project Lead - james@demnext.org

https://www.demnext.org/projects/cities

DemocracyNext