Democratic Innovation and Digital Transformation

Exploring the intersection with insights from Nets4Dem

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Mission Lead Future Technologies and Democracies at Democratic Society

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- Democratic Innovation in the Digital Era
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Democratic Society

We have been working to promote democracy since 2010. We carry out practical projects, conduct research and develop new democratic concepts that enable people to participate in the decisions that shape their lives.

Mission Future Technologies and Democracy

Democracy-in-the-loop technology development and implementation

(developers and government)

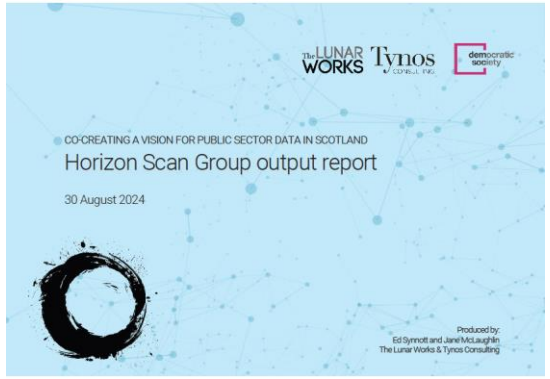
Building democratic infrastructure for the digital era

(multi-level governments & administration)

Advocacy for democracy, and rights-based based digital policy

(EU)

KT4D
Knowledge Technologies for Democracy



democratic society

The LUNAR WORKS | Tynos CONSULTING

Nets4Dem

Innovating democracy, together.

Introducing Nets4Dem

A network of networks on
democratic innovation
for policymakers, practitioners
and researchers

“Innovating democracy, together”

WHO WE ARE

- A **meta-network** of civil society, research institutions and public bodies advancing democracy in Europe and beyond.
- Together, we work to strengthen our joint capacity to **implement innovative democracy initiatives** at local, national and European levels.
- We consolidate **knowledge**, build **capacity**, shape **policy,** develop **solutions,** and help move from ideas to execution.
- We also **connect** groups and regions traditionally underrepresented in the democracy conversation.
- Initiated with EU support, the network is now **open for membership**.

WHAT IS DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION FOR US?

- Processes that **increase and deepen citizens' engagement** and participation and strengthen their influence over how they are governed.

- This includes the **adaptation of traditional** democratic mechanisms and **development of new** approaches.

WHY DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION?

- Our democracies must become more inclusive, participatory and effective so they can **rebuild trust** with citizens and help **depolarize** society.

- Such renewal requires our societies to **experiment** with innovative forms and practices of democracy.

INITIATING MEMBERS

ces
Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra

coglobal

DEMOCRACY
REPORTING
INTERNATIONAL

democratic
society

DEMOS
HELSINKI

EGMONT

European
Partnership for
Democracy

EURO
CITIES

INSTITUT
ZA FILOZOFIJU
I DRUŠTVENU
TEORIJU

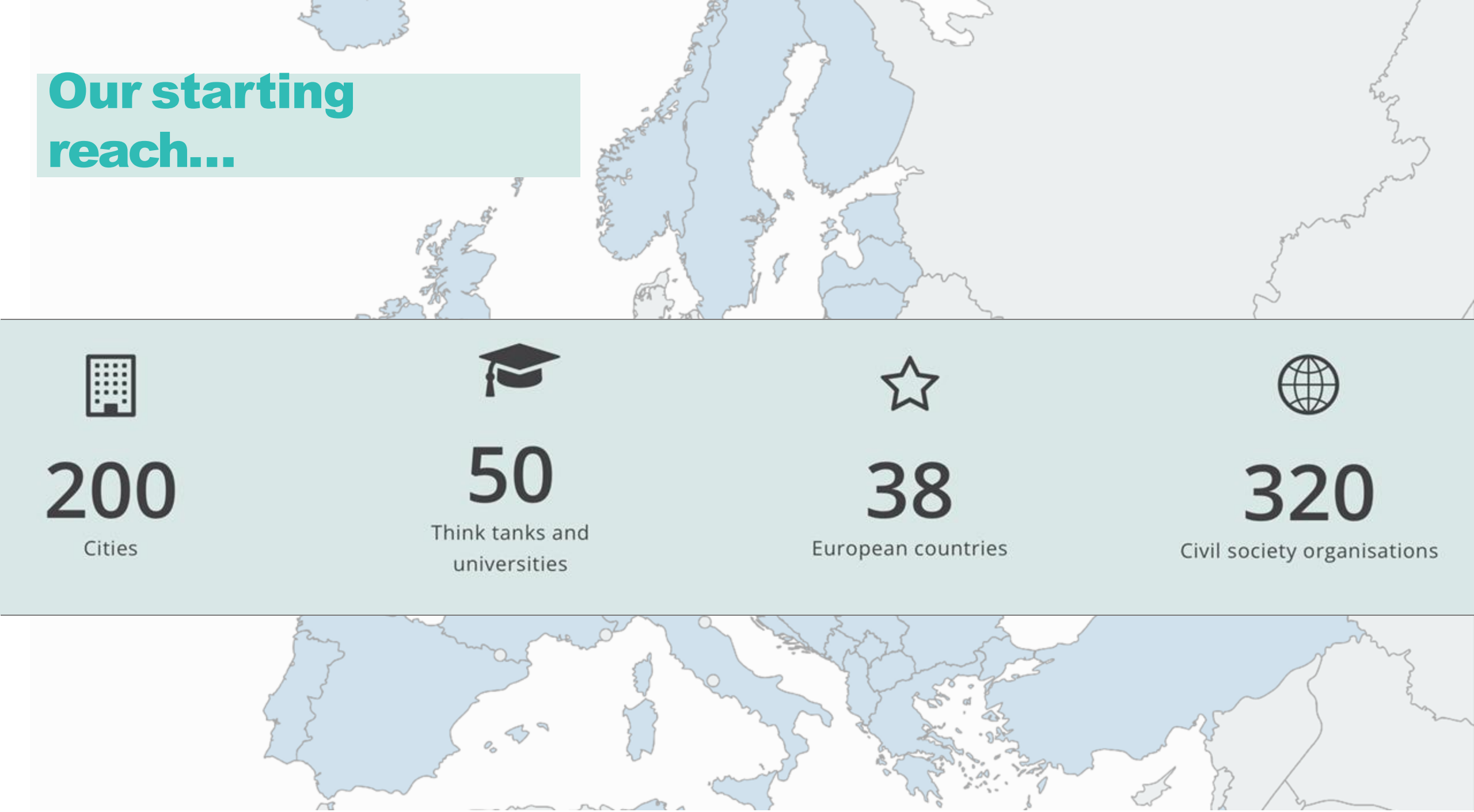
Opensourcepolitics

PEOPLE
POWERED

TEPSA
trans-
european
policy
studies
association

Funded by
the European Union

Our starting reach...



200
Cities

50
Think tanks and universities

38
European countries

320
Civil society organisations

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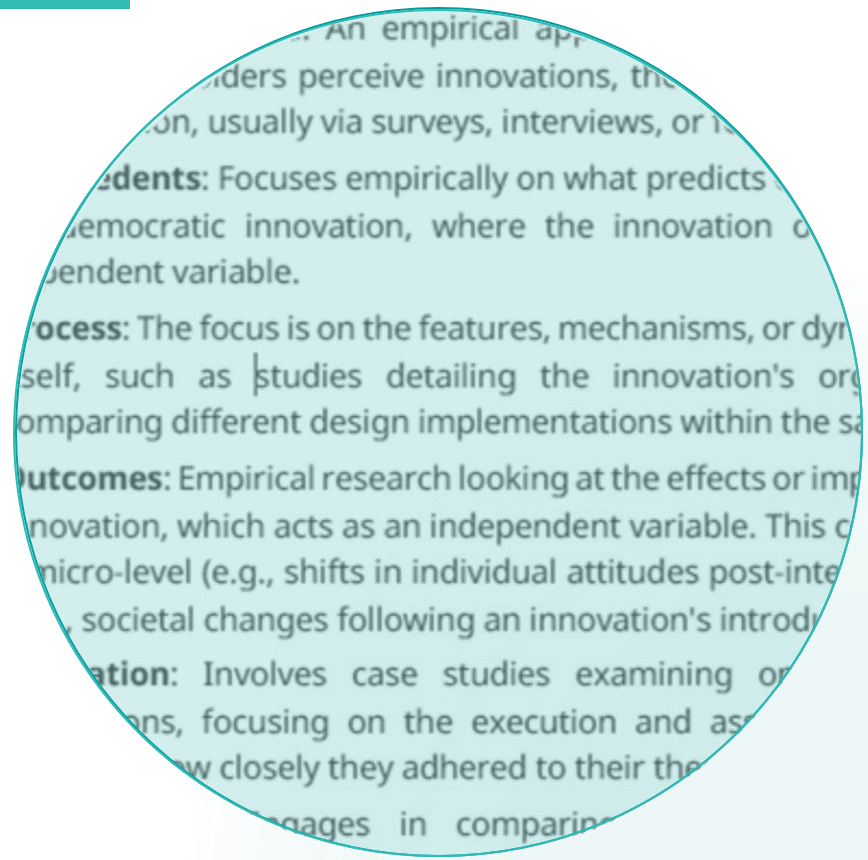
WHAT WE DO

Nets4Dem connects knowledge

- **Online Knowledge Database:** To feature the results of over 400 EU-funded research projects on democratic innovation.

- **Online Resource Centre:** A curated selection of the top tools, guides, and materials on democratic innovation in 15 languages.



Nets4Dem builds capacities

- **Rising Stars Mentorship Program**: supporting democracy practitioners through peer-to-peer mentorship programs.
- **Democracy Accelerator**: providing government institutions and organisations with training, peer learning and mentorship sessions on democratic innovation.
- **Participation Playbook**: a practical tool guide that helps practitioners and policymakers develop step-by-step plans for implementing participatory initiatives in their individual contexts.

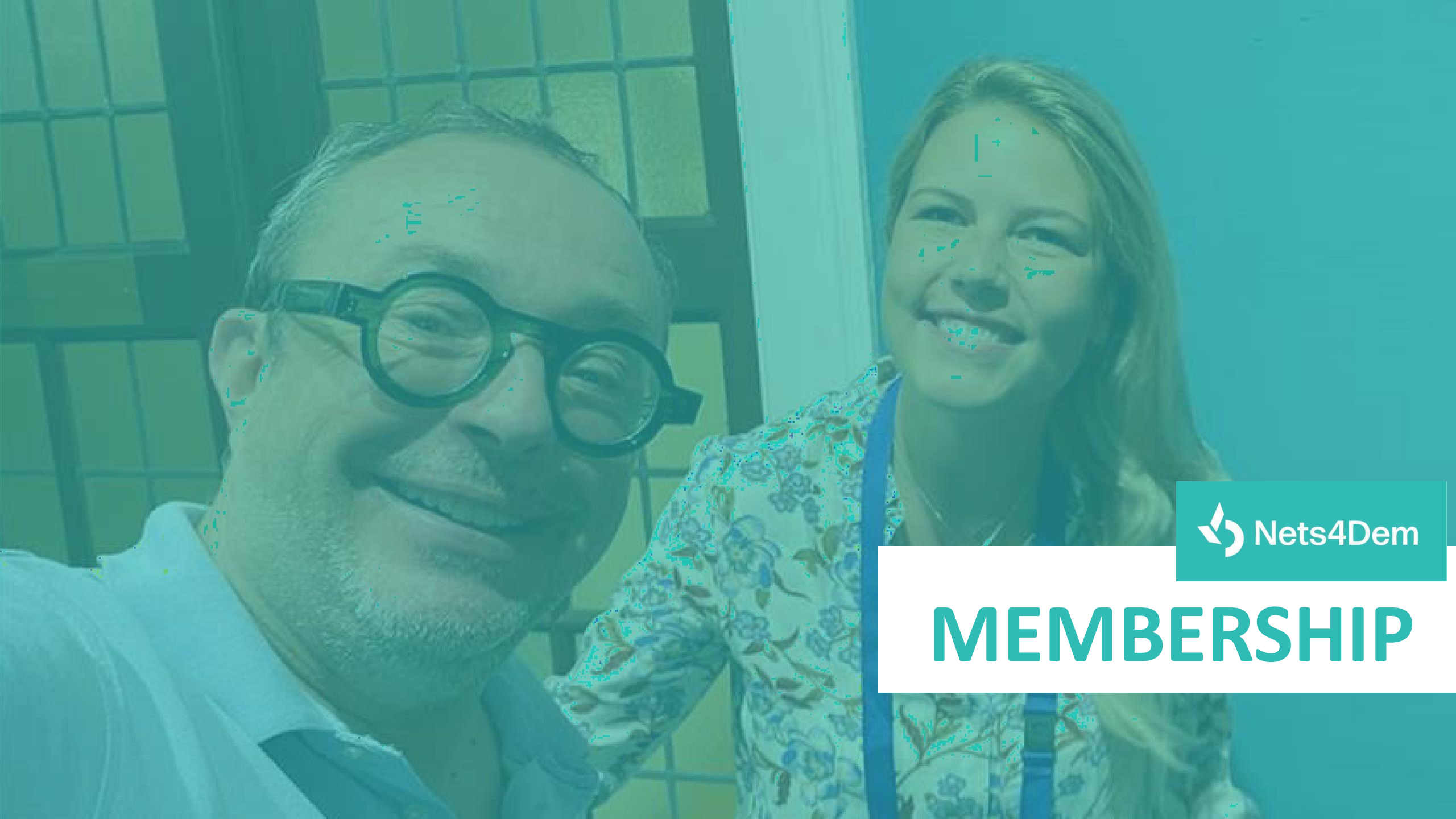
Nets4Dem develops solutions

- **Democracy Labs:** Bringing together policymakers and practitioners to co-create & test innovative approaches to participatory decision-making (2024 hosted by the City of Barcelona).

- **Democratic Innovation Award:** Promoting successful democracy initiatives which involve local communities and ensure diversity, inclusion, and multi-level collaboration.

Nets4Dem shapes policy

- **High-level policy dialogues** and retreats, helping policymakers translate academic knowledge into practice.
- Evidence-based **policy recommendations** on democratic renewal.
- Creating trustworthy and stable relationships between policy-makers, researchers and practitioners for **multi-level-governance collaborations**.



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MEMBERSHIP

Learn more & join the network!

www.nets4dem.eu

Funded by the European Union

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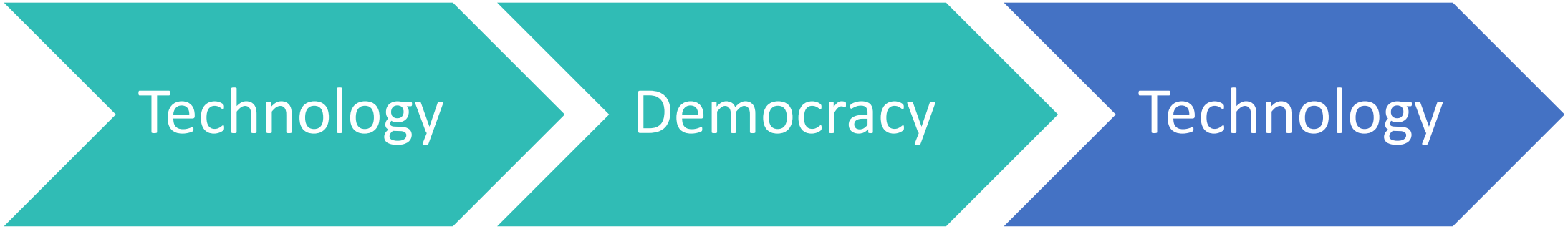
Democratic Innovation in the Digital Era

Intersections between technology and democracy

Intersections between Democracy and Technology



→ Access to information

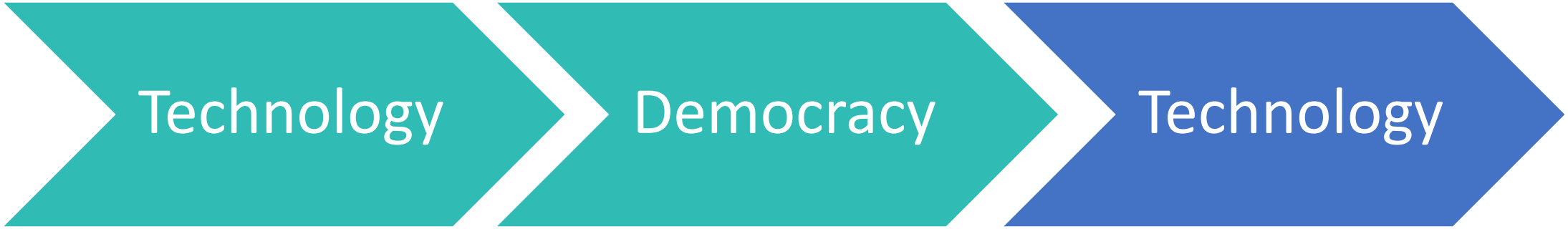
→ Data- and evidence-based policy making

→ New forms of publics and spaces for sharing opinion

→ Increased efficiency and effectiveness of public services

→ Democratic Innovation: Increased pathways for public sector to engage with citizens

- Participatory governance: Direct, secure digital tools to empower citizens to shape policy fostering accountable governance tailored to public needs.



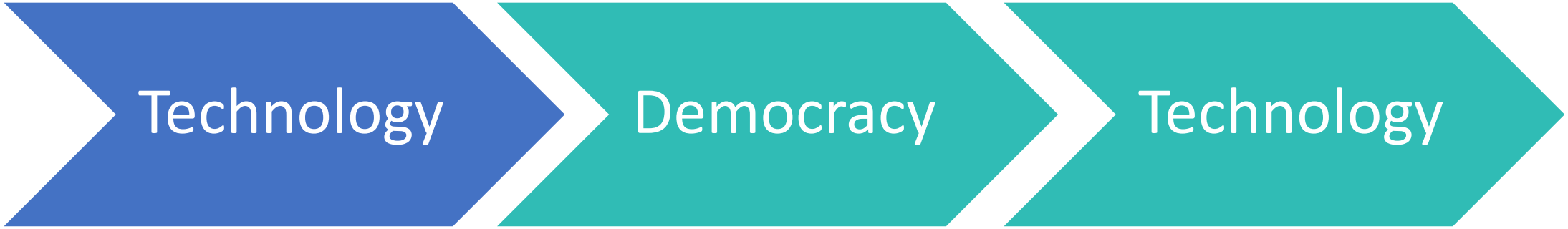
→ Disinformation, misinformation and polarization

→ New publics ≠ public spaces

→ Monopolization and centralization of power in the private market. Governments/administrations are dependent on private actors

→ Lack of trust in digital technologies, also when used by governments

→ Digital gap and a perpetuation of social inequalities through digital technologies.



- →***Need to reimagine a digital society built on the principles of public good***
- →From reactive to proactive policy making
- →Critical digital literacy
- →Public money = public code
- →Data as a public good
- →Democratic design of digital (democratic) innovation

From reactive to proactive policy making

Inherent **market focus** in digital policy making

Capitalist Optimism: emphasising the potential of digital technologies to catalyse economic growth and innovation.

Capitalist Future Proofing: aims at safeguarding individuals from the more exploitative effects of these technologies.

© Resilient Digital Africa

Critical digital literacy

“The instrumentality (e.g. the technology) becomes a master and works fatally as if possessed of a will of its own – not because it has a will but because man has not”.

John Dewey (1927) *The publics and its problems: essay in political inquiry*

© Critical Digital Literacy Wiki

Public Money = Public Code

→ When governments and administrations buy or source digital technology = great power in the tendering process.

→ Unlike regulation, tenders can express what we want instead of just safeguarding us for negative effects.

→ Barcelona…

Data as a public good

→ Experiment with data cooperatives

→Strengthen civic engagement by creating data intermediaries, enabling on the ground, and data informed public engagement.

Democratic design for the Digital Era

What do we need for digitally mediated democratic innovation?

Digitally mediated democratic innovation

Digitally mediated democratic innovation

→ We need democratic design, development and deployment of digital technologies.

→ Democracy-in-the-loop approach

- Added value
- Transparency and accountability
- Meaningful friction – democratic stewardship

KT4D
Knowledge Technologies for Democracy

Mission

Fostering civic participation in democracy capitalising on the benefits of knowledge technologies

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Added Value

We need to find ways to democratically address too-complex (wicked) problems.

What are we substituting by using digital tools?

Wes Cockx & Google DeepMind / Better Images of AI / AI large language models / CC-BY 4.0

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Jamillah Knowles & Reset.Tech Australia / Better Images of AI / People with phones / CC-BY 4.0

Overcoming opacity – creating transparent and accountable systems

→ Trust

→ Traceability and transparency

→ True algorithmic accountability

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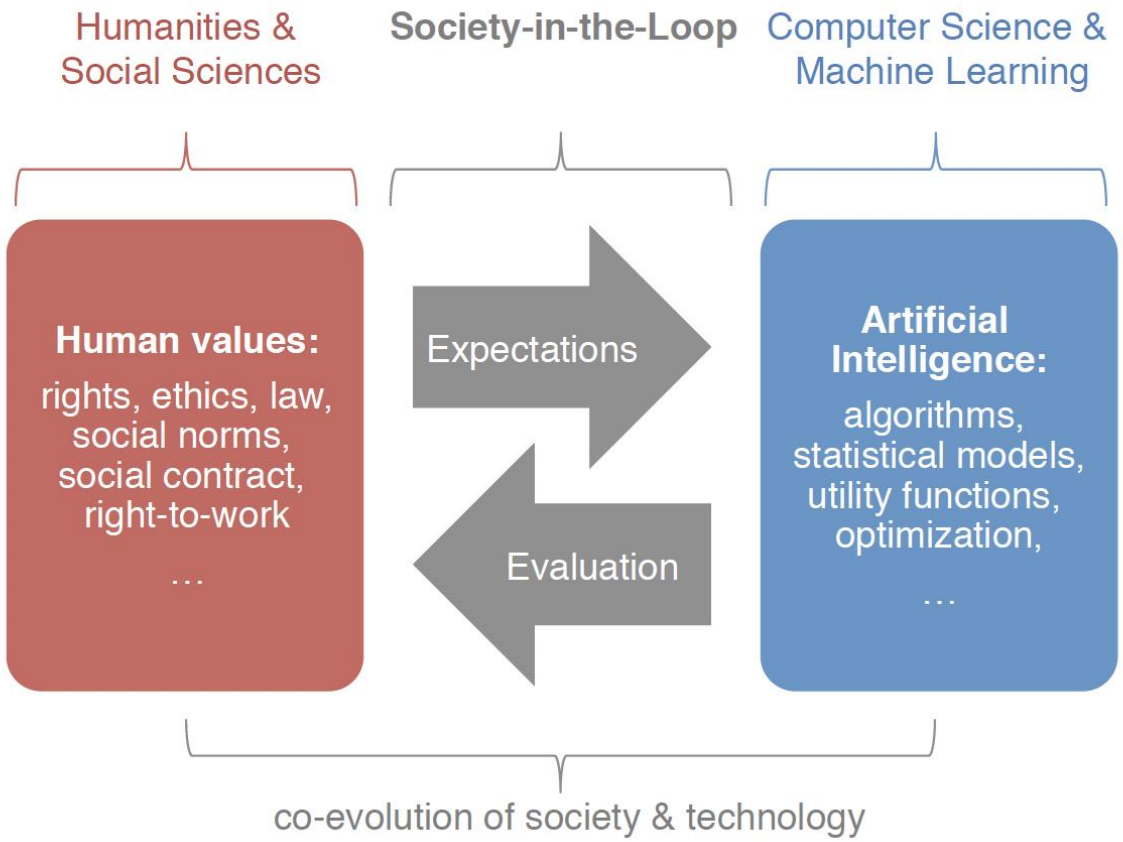

Rahwan, Iyad. "Society-in-the-Loop: Programming the Algorithmic Social Contract."

Meaningful friction and democratic stewardship of digital technology

"**Human-in-the-loop** AI is about embedding the judgement of *individual* humans or groups in the optimization of AI systems with *narrow* impact…" (Rahwan 2017, 3)

"**Society-in-the-Loop** is about embedding the values of *society*, as a whole, in the algorithmic governance of societal outcomes that have *broad implications*." (Rahwan 2017, 3).

Democracy-in-the-Loop as a concept of embedding *democratic intervention points* into the technology, to encourage negotiations and adjustments of parameters for *digital democracy tools*.

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Digitally mediated democratic innovation

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→ Democracy-in-the-loop approach

- Added value
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Looking forward to the challenges ahead!

The Democratic Society

demsoc.org

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