GOVERNING WITH CITIZENS

Embedding democratic innovations into societies

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DEMOS HELSINKI

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About Nets4Dem

Nets4Dem is a network of networks, creating a hub for collaboration and advanced research in the field of democratic innovation, civic deliberation, participation and citizenship education. Nets4Dem unites policymakers, practitioners and researchers, to strengthen our joint capacity to implement innovative democracy initiatives at local, national and European levels.

About Demos Helsinki

Demos Helsinki is a globally operating, non-profit, and independent think tank that conducts research, creates new policy tools, and helps build capacities that instigate and sustain essential transitions. Demos Helsinki collaborates with local and national governments, international organisations, civil society, and companies to create the tools that will define this pivotal moment in global history.

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Executive Summary

In an era of increasing democratic fragility, citizens have expressed persistently growing dissatisfaction with how representative democracy is practiced. While democratic forms of governance remain widely supported across the globe, the gaps between democratic ideals and their implementation by institutions and democratic actors is unsustainably increasing. Beyond a responsive posture, the virtues and limits of democratic innovations are increasingly seen as a response to structural trends of democratic malaise. Yet they may also be an essential part of the arsenal needed to face the emergent, complex and structural crises being faced by societies across the globe. Crises and transitions that unevenly distribute harms across communities, societies and nations.[1] It is on these terrains of democratic resilience and societal transformations that democratic innovations must contribute to egalitarian democratic futures.

Democratic innovations — participatory and deliberative processes aimed at increasing meaningful citizen engagement — have gained traction across Europe. However, the incorporation of these new democratic practices and innovations in public administrations and their acceptance in society remains a critical challenge. This report investigates how democratic innovations can be effectively embedded into both public administrations and society simultaneously.

Drawing on insights from 17 in-depth interviews with senior civil servants across local, national, and European Union (EU) governance levels across eight countries across geographical Europe, held between late 2023-May 2024, this study maps existing trends, identifies challenges, and proposes recommendations for strengthening democratic participation. It is aimed at enhancing the practices and tactics of policymakers, practitioners, advocates, and civil society.

Our findings, learnings and recommendations can be summarised as follows

Six trends on the evolution & spread of democratic innovations across Europe

1. **Receding transformative possibilities**: the use of democratic innovations to transform lived societal conditions, deepen democracy and pursue forms socio-economic justice have receded. Today's innovations often pursue the goals of policy efficacy, legitimation of existing representative institutions and democratic resilience.

2. **Slowing growth:** both deliberative innovations and participatory budgeting have grown considerably in Europe over the last decades, but this growth shows signs of slowing down since 2021.

3. **Hyper-localised democracy**: the overwhelming majority of democratic innovations occur within local government, though both what is considered "local" is being reconceived. There is increasing use of innovations in national government and in EU institutions.

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[1] On the range of short and long-term risks and perceived abilities of governments to respond to these, see World Economic Forum (2024) 6–11, 85–6.

4. **Institutionalization is well underway**: participatory budgeting initiatives have arguably been institutionalized for some time and the rate at which deliberative innovations have been institutionalized has increased dramatically since 2020.

5. **Uneven geographies**: different types of democratic innovations are asymmetrically spread and geographically clustered around certain political systems across Europe.

6. **Social problems of varied complexity and relevance:** different democratic innovations are increasingly being used to address long-term, complex, technical and intractable social problems. Their success is evident in some cases, unclear in others.

Embedding democratic innovations into public administrations

Key Learnings

1. Learning 1: **Civil servants are motivated by long-term cultural change**

   Participatory civil servants are often dedicated to participatory governance for the long-haul; they are motivated by a long-term, strategic, commitment to transforming the governance cultures of their administrative environments.

2. Learning 2: **Civil servants who practiced participatory forms of governance identified 5 structural challenges** to promoting citizen participation in administrations:

   (i) organisational inertia;

   (ii) financial constraints and competence constraints at lower levels of governance;

   (iii) civil servants, policymakers and politicians are deeply sceptical of citizens' capacities, resulting in lack of authorising environments;

   (iv) institutional and professional marginalisation and co-option of participation process;

   (v) burnout amongst participatory civil servants.

Key Recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, advocates, civil society and politicians

Recommendation 1: build and sustain truly diverse inter-institutional alliances, ones fully cognisant of their knowledge blindspots.

Local, national and EU policymakers need to create and join existing inter-institutional alliances of participatory policymakers. These need to better incorporate a diversity of perspectives (especially the capacity of European policymakers to learn from long-standing practices across the Global South) to improve standards, elevate good practices through knowledge sharing, experimentation and the ability to build enthusiasm and movements within administrative contexts, whilst guarding against burnout and personnel turnover.

Recommendation 2: build a persuasive contemporary case for democratic innovations by tactically using narratives of policy efficacy, legitimation and resilience.

The contemporary persuasive case for advancing democratic innovations may not rest in making a better case for democracy. Policymakers, advocates, civil society and capacity building organisations should, depending heavily on context, centre narratives of policy efficacy, legitimation of existing leadership or institutions and systemic resilience amidst complex challenges. These narratives, in contrast to those that centre democracy or participation, are capable of building broad alliances.

Recommendation 3: build and use a robust evidence base for the efficacy of democratic innovations to demonstrate their financial feasibility and long-term societal impact.

A robust and well-rounded evidence base of the efficacy and impact of democratic innovations is needed to make the case for their increased use in administrations. An suitable impact model will allow policymakers and politicians to not only evaluate the financial feasibility of innovations, but weigh these against social costs potentially saved. It also allows policymakers to identify the appropriate participatory process for given sets of policy problems, feeds into their evaluation of that participatory process and can be used to iteratively improve both the process, delivery and societal effects of democratic innovations.

Recommendation 4: develop a nuanced understanding of existing and often complex regulatory and legislative environments to use these tools proactively rather than with ambivalence.

Regulation, legislation and soft norms already shape the environments in which participatory policymakers function. They both hinder and enable citizen engagement, yet are often tangential and always insufficient in helping create a cultural change within administrations. Policymakers need to develop a nuanced understanding of this regulatory environment in order to shift their stance from one of ambivalence to proactiveness.

Recommendation 5: public administrations need to build in-house governance systems, capabilities and resources.

Local, national and EU public administrations need to build in-house expertise for the design and delivery of different forms of citizen participation, ensure that diverse skill-sets are secured in participation units that are effectively embedded across administrative siloes, transparently determine and use appropriate standards for design and implementation and build these into procurement protocols, practical tool-kits and skills training, and above all, ensuring democratic innovations are implemented effectively with equity, inclusivity and propriety in mind.

Transforming societies: equitably embedding democratic innovations into communities and societies

Key Learnings:

1. Learning 1: **Civil servants wish to support bottom-up approaches to and uses for democratic innovations.**

   Civil servants wish to both enable and support civil society actors in their ability to set or frame the terms of political debate. Yet their capacity to do so is severely constrained, but not entirely absent. Fully cognisant of the structural constraints by civil society, social movements and other intermediary actors, there is little knowledge on how to strategically redirect resources with equity in mind, to these actors.

2. Learning 2: **Civil servants identified 4 core obstacles to embedding meaningful engagement across societies**.

   These obstacles are also faced by participation practitioners when attempting to embed citizen engagement in administrations.

   (i) Inadequate cognisance of the 'dark sides' of advancing citizen participation can result in neglecting questions of contextualisation, suitability and maladaption.

   (ii) Struggles for representation and an inadequate grasp of power-shifts between democratic actors.

   (iii) Democratic innovations can fail to engage society at large.

   (iv) Lack of long-term perspective on systemic societal transformations that can result from democratic innovations.

Key Recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, social movements and civil society

Recommendation 6: enable bottom-up approaches and where possible, combine these with top-down approaches, to embed democratic innovations across different democratic spaces and actors.

For long-term system change and energised democracies, policymakers, advocates, civil society and social movements should encourage a *dynamic relationship* between bottom-up mobilisations and top-down processes of democratic innovations. These may, at times, conflict. There is however an intrinsic value in enabling a robust public sphere. Strategic commissioning and redirection of resources for respected civil society actors can pluralise democratic debate between public institutions and multiple publics.

Recommendation 7: administrations should enable civil society and local public actors to undertake both large-scale and localised democratic innovations without requiring direct policy instrumentalisation.

A thriving democracy depends on supporting different and diverse *demoi*. Civil society in certain examples have reached considerable numbers of the citizenry when using democratic innovations. Here the function of democratic innovations is to improve the trust between citizens to collectively articulate their political projects (in contrast to trust in public institutions), to shape directions of public debate, to shape election discourses and explicitly challenge government policies. These ventures can be both enabled (in a variety of ways) and strategically commissioned by policymakers.

Recommendation 8: local, representative and respected civil society, leaders and core associations must be properly integrated into the proper design and implementation of democratic innovations, whilst ensuring integrity, if their results are to be sustainable.

To ensure that participatory processes empower communities and their results are sustainable, intermediary actors such as civil society, leaders, associations and trade unions need to be mobilised and engaged with, rather than circumvented. At the same time policymakers need to ensure that existing interests do not hijack democratic innovations.

Recommendation 9: mix and combine democratic innovations to address problems of scale and to centre equity.

Policymakers need to consider how best to combine democratic innovations such as participatory budgeting and citizens' assemblies. This allows for the deficiencies and possibilities of each innovation to be addressed and allows deficits of scale to be overcome. There are examples where long-term socio-economic equity considerations are centered.

Recommendation 10: sustainably devolve to and share power with local communities, coupling this with increased social infrastructure investment to empower citizens and nurture a local ecosystem responsive to local needs.

Administrations need to selectively and sustainably devolve decision-making power and some financial resources to local communities. This should not extend to key public service provisions or other public safety nets provided by governments, but relates to increased social infrastructure investment that would empower local communities and citizens to participate in and shape their future. Common examples of this include decision-making on Community Wealth Funds. This is increasingly needed in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and regions.

Four future policy directions to explore

Interviewed civil servants also identified four policy areas that are in urgent need of exploration, many of which work has begun in the field of democratic innovations.

1. **Multi-level governance**: there is a need to better grasp how democratic innovations can function effectively across multiple levels of governance. For instance, how can local concerns be effectively linked to national and supranational levels? For instance, how are democratic innovations and policy advances achieved at city levels of governance limited by national governance constraints?

2. **Governance, policy and societal impacts of democratic innovations**: how should we conceive of the impact of democratic innovations that best enable iterative learning about their design and implementation, as well as their long-term potential to transform societal realities?

3. **Legislative tactics:** while there is increased use of legal norms to enable participation within government institutions, a nuanced appreciation of the different types of norms and places for use in institutional development is still underdeveloped.

4. **Functions in illiberal, autocratic and authoritarian regimes**: what functions can democratic innovations serve in illiberal, autocratic and authoritarian regimes? Can they guard against democratic erosion, what are the dangers of co-option in their use? And what are the effects of their considerable use in these contexts?

1. Introduction

Throughout 2024 an unprecedented number of votes were cast around the world. In some countries elections revitalised democracy, had largely negligible effects on democratic systems in most nations or undermined it in others. The recent democratic elections in Germany saw a resounding increase in the turnout percentage of voters from 76.4% to 83.5% of eligible voters. Representative democracy as a system of government remains widely supported, but citizens are increasingly dissatisfied with how it is being practised.[2] This is especially true of citizens in high-income countries.[3] Research also indicates that citizens increasingly feel that politicians are considerably out of touch and lacking in competence. Yet, more importantly, citizens do not view themselves as being the main protagonists of bettering the practice of democracy; this expectation lies at the feet of politicians.[4] The ideal of democracy is not in crisis but it is fragile because of the increasing gap between ideals and practices.

In terms of global trends, the Varieties of Democracy Institute's latest field-leading report presents a bleak landscape. In the last decade, there has been a rapid increase in the portion of the world's population living in autocracies: rising to 71% in 2024 from 21% in 2003. Tendencies towards democratisation can only be seen in countries accounting for 5% of the world's population and the number of liberal democracies across the world has fallen by ¼ to just 32 in the last decade alone.[5] Others have termed this an "accelerating democratic recession,"[6] noting that the levels of global democracy have regressed to those last seen in 1985.

In Europe, if conceived geographically, trends in democratic quality have been marked by stark geographical differences across the continent.[7] Levels of democratic erosion have largely stabilised in Western European countries over the last two years, despite sharp falls in performance over the previous decade. Central and Eastern European countries continue their regression in democratic quality, with the region undergoing its 19th year of decline in democratic transition scores. Today 66% of Eastern Europe (including Belarus) live in autocratic or autocratizing electoral democracies – another long-term trend driven by developments in Hungary, Belarus, Serbia, Romania, Croatia and Georgia.[8]

These long-term trends have shaped Europe's contemporary policy atmospheres in one regard. There is a greater stress in defending the varieties of European democracy from external interference. During the 2024 elections, EU institutions made considerable efforts to combat disinformation and manipulation. Yet the aforementioned trends also point to the

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[2] Pew Research Centre (2024a).
[3] Pew Research Centre (2024c). Explores these countries: Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.
[4] Pew Research Centre (2024b).
[5] Nord et al. (2024).
[6] Diamond (2022).
[7] Foa et al. (2020) 22-25; Freedom House (2023); Freedom House (2022); Freedom House (2021).
[8] Nord et al. (2024) 9–10, 12, 14, 21, 39, 41–42.

age-old problem of growing "democratic deficits" in national governments and EU institutions. It is partly against this background that democratic innovations have emerged.

The virtues, possibilities and necessity of democratic innovations need to be seen as a response to the aforementioned structural trends of democratic malaise. As well as a key part of the arsenal needed to face the emergent, complex and structural crises being faced by societies across the globe.[9] These crises are unevenly distributing harms across communities, societies and nations.[10] We need to deepen, strengthen and defend democracy if we are to confront contemporary systemic inequalities and advocate for a just and fair transition across both climate and digital transformations of societies. It is also on these terrains of democratic resilience and societal transformations that democratic innovations have emerged.[11]

Efforts to establish new participatory and deliberative democratic practices have become known in the last two decades as democratic innovations. In this report, we work from a broadly accepted definition of *democratic innovations*. They are **"processes or institutions that are new to a policy issue, policy role, or level of governance, and developed to reimagine and deepen the role of citizens in governance processes by increasing opportunities for participation, deliberation and influence."**[12] Far from novel, ancestors of today's democratic innovations can be traced to the Sumerian people.[13] Democratic innovations can be a broad category,[14] but this report focuses on trends, perceptions and needs related to deliberative mini-publics (including citizens' assemblies and citizens' panels), participatory budgeting, as well as broader context-dependent practices of citizen engagement (e.g., urban explorations, world cafes).

This report furthers our understanding of how democratic innovations can be better embedded into administrations and societies. As a scoping report it seeks to inform institutional reform strategies of policymakers, advocates, practitioners and civil society for what constitutes good democratic practice through citizen engagement,[15] whilst advocating for better rooting these innovations within our communities and societies.

The report first explores what can be expected from democratic innovations and how much and what forms of traction these recently fringe innovations have gained across Europe (Chapter 3). Against this broader historical and empirical setting, it then explores the attitudes, needs and practices of senior civil servants across diverse European political and governance contexts. Here perspectives and practices are explored for embedding democratic innovations in administrations and across society.

Between late 2023 and May 2024, interviews were conducted with local civil servants from Budapest, Camden, Helsinki and Messina to national civil servants working in national administrations in Ireland, Finland, Scotland and the United Kingdom, as well as public officials

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[9] Tooze (2022).

[10] On the range of short and long-term risks and perceived abilities of governments to respond to these, see World Economic Forum (2024) 6–11, 85–6.

[11] Willis et al. (2022).

[12] Elstub and Escobar (2019) 11.

[13] Keane (2022).

[14] For an overview of expansions, see Burns et al. (2021).

[15] Fung and Wright (2003) 5.

within European Union institutions. These are visualised in Figure 2 below. The governance levels explored include local city levels, national and supranational. 17 semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior civil servants to explore three broad questions:

1. How have policymakers approached embedding democratic innovations and what have they learnt from these efforts?
2. What are the persistent challenges and promising practices they have identified for embedding democratic innovations in both administrations and society more broadly?
3. Which areas of policy research are in need of further advancement?

The attitudes, needs and promising practices of senior civil servants are then explored in Chapters 4 and 5 below, before potential future directions for policy work are identified in the conclusion.

2. Research Foci

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Key Insights:

- ❖ Policymaker attitudes, needs and practices are understudied and a key lever for embedding democratic innovations.

- ❖ Embedding democratic innovations in democratic systems is rather than just institutionalisation within public institutions.

- ❖ Observations were obtained from 17 semi-structured interviews with civil servants experienced with participatory policymaking; 16 scoping interviews with practitioners, civil society organisations (CSOs) and academics; and a systemic literature review.

- ❖ Limits of this report are an exclusive focus on the situated perspectives of civil servants with experience of democratic innovations; limited civil servant views across 5 European countries and EU institutions; and a non-comparative focus on local, national and supranational levels of governance.

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To better embed democratic innovations in both public administrations and society, this report identifies the attitudes, needs and practices of policymakers in relation to democratic innovations. This chapter clarifies what is meant by the attitudes, needs and practices of policymakers and why these are important (section 2.1) and what is meant by embedding democratic innovations. The report's full research design is detailed in Appendix 3.

2.1. Policymaker attitudes, needs and practices

This report builds on the insights of senior civil servants with experience in the practice of democratic innovations and participatory methods in government (see Figure 2 below). Interview subjects did not include elected representatives holding government office, but did include those senior civil servants that served such offices and representatives. The attitudes and practices of politicians are also beyond the scope of this report,[16] as are those of policymakers with little knowledge or experience of democratic innovations.[17]

There is mounting evidence that these civil servants are at the forefront of driving and shaping participatory governance within administrations; **they constitute a crucial lever**

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[16] For research that does look at this question: exploring attitudes of politicians and elected representatives as policymakers, see Macq and Jacquet (2023); Oross and Kiss (2023); Apolitical Foundation (2024).

[17] For research that explores this angle, see a rare study on a large sample of policymaker attitudes in Finland: Koskimaa et al. (2024).

for systemic change within and beyond institutions.[18] These actors have been variously termed as *internal activists, participatory champions or participatory policymakers*. Despite the sense that they play a crucial role in democratic governance because of their ability to operate within and between key sites of the democratic system – whether between institutions, informal networks or between ways of speaking and knowing[19] – scant attention has been paid to their attitudes, needs and practices.[20] This report aims to close this gap.

The second reason to focus on the attitudes, needs and practices of senior civil servants familiar with democratic innovations is to identify an internal sense of how change can and does occur within public administrations.[21] Quite practically, this perspective can help other participatory civil servants see shared problems, blindspots and possibilities. It can also allow advocates, practitioners and CSOs to empathise with and tailor their approaches to the realities faced by policymakers.

2.2. Embedding innovations into democratic systems

The importance of institutionalisation – systematically integrating democratic innovations in existing policy processes, formal structures and/or legal rules – has emerged as pivotal in policy and academic literature.[22] This has largely been a response to the experimental and one-off nature of democratic innovation initiatives, a belief that they do not fully connect with administrative governance practices, political institutions and sympathetic policymakers. While efforts to understand the significant challenges of how to institutionalise democratic innovations are underway, recent literature seeks to understand how these innovations grapple with and take root in the broader societal dynamics and the various processes of change that underpin a robust democratic system.

This expanded perspective, conceptually labelled **embeddedness**, emphasises how democratic innovations are in "productive relation to other institutions of the democratic system," emphasising how they sit in dynamic and active relation to their "social and political moorings."[23] It is this broader question of embedding democratic innovations, rather than their institutionalisation, that is the focus of this report.

Conceptual work on embedding invites us to keep three considerations in mind.

1. When we ask the question of **how** to embed democratic innovations, this involves asking ongoing questions of "rootedness" in the democratic system – **characterised by a broad and solid constituency, acceptability and the mainstreaming and normalisation of citizen participation**.

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[18] On policymakers as internal activists see Escobar (2022); Blijleven and van Hulst (2021); Abers (2019); Olsson and Hysing (2012).

[19] Mansbridge et al. (2012) 1–26.

[20] An exception in this regard is a focus on the practices and discourses (and blindspots) in the European Union, see Oleart (2023a); Oleart (2023b).

[21] Dean (2023); Bherer et al. (2017) (despite being critical).

[22] For influential recent policy reports on practices of institutionalization, see e.g., Edgar and Baeck (2023), Apolitical Foundation (2024), OECD (2020) and Berg et al. (2023).

[23] Bussu et al. (2022).

2. **Embeddedness is not merely a desired goal for democratic innovations but an ongoing process, where policy choices concerning means, ends and institutional functions continuously create roots and path dependencies within democratic ecosystems**. The ongoing practices of policymakers often unwittingly embed values, interests and approaches that may undermine the long-term desirability and sustainability of democratic innovations. This approach to embeddedness requires practitioners and policymakers to have an ongoing reflexive sense of responsibility amidst innovation practices.

3. **Institutionalization may be counterproductive to embedding democratic innovations.** The strategies and tactics of embedding often involve assessing the limits, desirability and productivity of institutionalisation within public administrations and institutions. Institutionalisation may, in other words, be counter-productive to embedding.

Building on existing research, this report examines the question of embedding democratic innovations through the following dimensions:

- Formal and informal practices of embedding – spanning from formal institutional policy processes and governance structures to different types of public democratic institutions, to informal relationships.

- Spaces and pace of embedding – spanning from permanent and sustained spaces of participation, as well as spaces of public power at different levels of governance, policy spaces and types of democratic institutions.

Based on these two dimensions, we can identify a loose framework for conceptualising the embedding of democratic innovations:

	Formal	**Informal**
Temporal	How can democratic innovations be embedded into repeat formal policymaking processes and governance structures?	How can the informal practices of policymakers, grassroots actors, and citizens shape the embedding of democratic innovations?
Spatial	How can democratic innovations be embedded into political and administrative institutions, at and across different levels of governance and across different policy spaces?	How can democratic innovations be embedded beyond elite institutions into the public sphere and into community relations?

Table 1. Conceptual table of "embedding" adapted from Bussu et al. (2022). Source: authors' own adaptation.

This report uses this framework to explore the promising practices and challenges of embedding democratic innovations into the broader democratic ecosystem. With the benefit of building on previous work on possible routes forward based on institutional design, the report mainly looks at understanding challenges and practices of embedding into practices of

administration, political processes, and integration into broader societal groups. It does so primarily through a comparative lens of senior civil servants' attitudes, needs and practices across Europe (see Figure 1). Chapter 3 describes some of the contemporary contexts and trends within which these attitudes, needs and practices take shape. Chapters 4 and 5 describe the main insights, specifically on the informal and formal shifts required to embed democratic innovations across democratic systems.
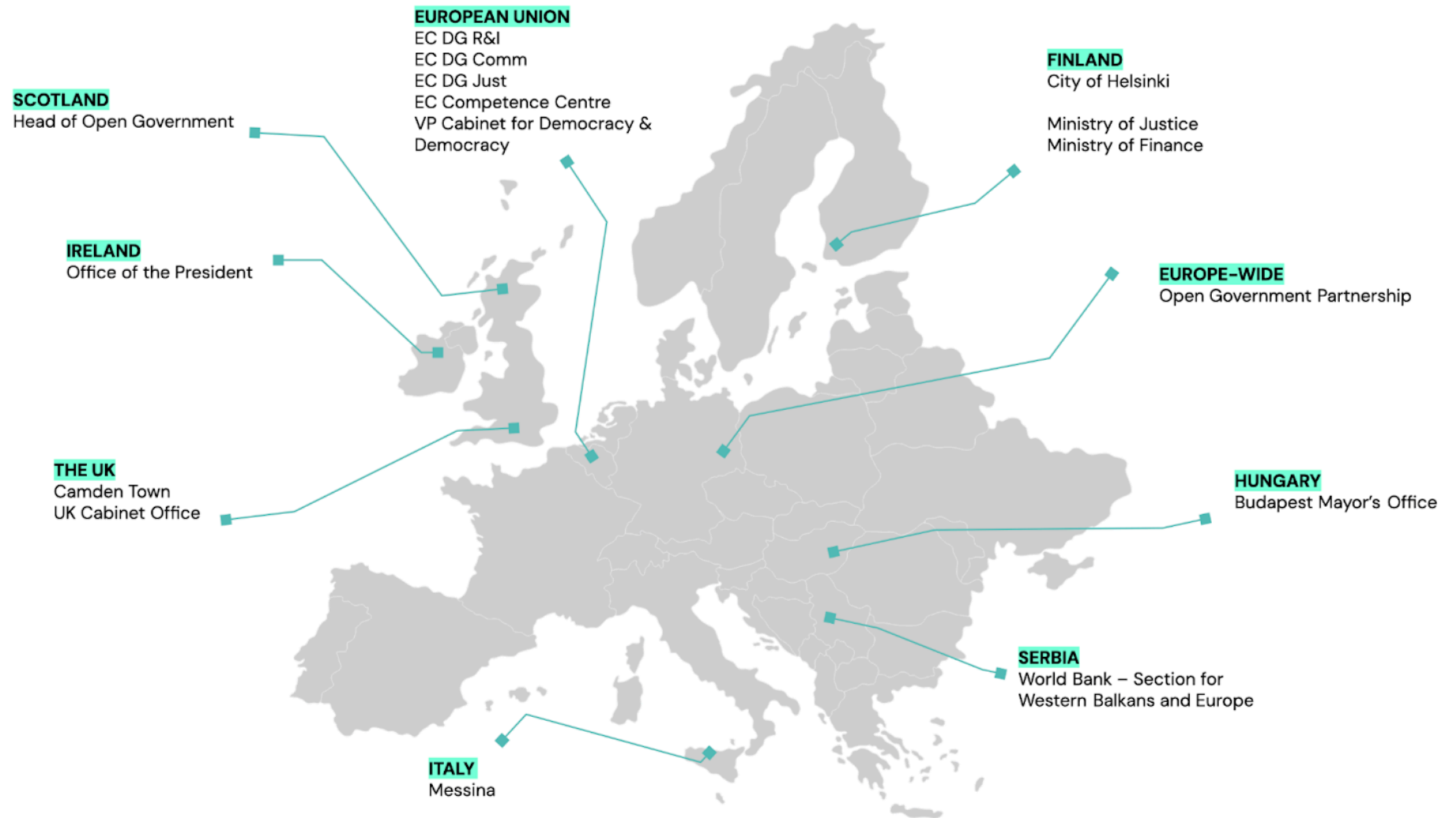
Figure 1. Locations and levels of governance of policymakers interviewed. Source: authors' own.

3. Mapping democratic innovations

Key Insights:

- ❖ Redistributive socio-economic justice has receded as an end for democratic innovations. Policy efficacy, legitimation of public institutions and democratic resilience have become dominant rationales.

- ❖ Deliberative innovations and participatory budgeting initiatives have grown considerably in Europe, but declined in growth since 2021.

- ❖ An overwhelming majority of democratic innovations take place at local government levels, though what is 'local' is being dynamically reconceived.

- ❖ Democratic innovations are becoming increasingly institutionalised, though this remains an Achilles heel for their long-term sustainability.

- ❖ Democratic innovations are asymmetrically spread and geographically clustered across Europe.

- ❖ Increasingly democratic innovations are used to address long-term, complex, technical and social policy problems; their success in doing so remains unclear.

In recent decades, democratic innovations have spread across the globe and seemingly proliferated across Europe. During the same period the concepts, processes and institutions of citizen engagement have diversified and changed in some of their forms and purposes, shaped largely by shifts in the structure of state institutions, democratic practices, international development funding and models of governance. This section traces some of the key historical shifts and empirical trends in the field of democratic innovations. It first looks at the purposes and ideals attached to democratic innovations over the last four decades (3.1). The following section looks at the scales, scope and spread of these processes across European countries, as well as the levels of governance and topics (3.2).

3.1. Ends of democratic innovations: socio-economic justice, legitimation, efficacy & resilience

The 1920s and 1930s were replete with attempts to think through the role of the public in politics and policy, as well as the form such a public should take. Yet it was not till the post-Second World War period that experimentation with democratic practices took hold. Whilst the founding of the European Union (EU) institutionalised the desire to circumvent and hold mass politics at arm's length,[24] its history is replete with moments – such as the present one – where keen institutional anxiety has emerged about the gap between mass publics and

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[24] Conway (2020) Chapter 2.

policymaking within EU institutions.[25] At the same time, the aftermath of the Second World War was fertile ground for attempts to examine and rethink the role of citizens and publics in liberal democracies. In the United States in the 1950s and 60s, C. Wright Mills, Martin Lipset and Sherry Arnstein released seminal works, whilst Carole Pateman and Henri LeFebvre did much the same in England and France, respectively.[26] Despite the vast differences between these intellectual contributions and their milieus, two broad problematics animated a number of these authors. First, for some, there was a concern with the ways in which dominance of economic power and its corollary in class struggle undermined or shaped democracy and democratic institutions. Second, there was an overriding concern in these works (with the exception of Lipset) with how to radically redistribute power in society to ensure greater structural equality, often via increased and more meaningful participation of vulnerable, marginalised or 'have-not' citizens.[27] These ideas were not siloed to democratic theory but influenced a range of new democratic practices.

A robust and long-lasting orientation towards **redistributive socio-economic justice** has historically been associated with the case of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre (see also section 5.2), though this has long since been in decline.[28] Following the nascence of democratisation in Brazil, the 1980s saw the mass mobilisation of urban social movements, labour unions and civil society actors that functioned effectively at a local level. In Porto Alegre, the Workers' Party came to power in 1989 after the right to participation was enshrined in the Brazilian constitution, enacting both a redistribution of power and resources. Operating effectively, if through different models, for over two decades, the Porto Alegre case offered a reversal of national trends in participatory budgeting; resources were consistently redistributed to economically poorer areas of the city, as commentators pointed out the ability of citizens to deliberate and centre to the good of the city as whole.[29] The origins of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre specifically focused on deepening democratisation through effectively empowering participation of vulnerable and marginalised communities – with the clear objective of redistributive social justice. The long-term societal transformations for the lives of the city's communities and citizens that resulted from this model of participatory budgeting are explored in section 5.2 below. Recent research also shows how the broader end of social equality remains important in Latin America, even if this may lag other purposes such as responsiveness.[30]

Archon Fung argues that the normative goal of redistributive social justice is today, far too "elusive … for the champions of participation."[31] When participatory budgeting was transplanted across the world and to Europe in the last decade of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty-first, this ideal was all but abandoned.[32] Amongst international organisations, participatory budgeting and other forms of participatory governance were transplanted across

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[25] The EU's 'democratic deficit' debates of the late 1990s and early 2000s resulted in both the Commission's White Paper and the Declaration of the Future of Europe in 2001. See European Commission (2001); European Council (2001).
[26] Mills (1956); Lipset (1960); Arnstein (1969); Lefebvre (1968); Pateman (1970).
[27] The wording is Arnstein's, Arnstein (1969) 216.
[28] Wampler and Goldfrank (2022).
[29] Pateman (2012); World Bank (2008).
[30] Pogrebinschi (2021) 22.
[31] Fung (2015).
[32] Sintomer et al. (2008).

the Global South through the 1990s by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).[33] In a 2012 report, the World Bank estimated, based on incomplete and inconsistent data, that it had invested approximately $85 billion since 1990 on initiatives that were participation-led initiatives in development assistance – ranging from community-based and community-driven development initiatives to top-down decentralisation projects.[34] Through the 1990s, during the implementation of structural adjustment programmes across the Global South, both the **IMF and WB saw participatory forms of governance for citizen engagement as essential to good and effective governance, whilst remaining agnostic about the ultimate ends of the policies** which were given effect through citizen participation initiatives.[35] The legitimation of policy initiatives was sought from local communities and dovetailed with institutional needs for effective policy uptake, delivery and efficacy amidst new public management strategies for state modernisation.

When participatory budgeting arrived at local levels in Spain and Italy, it did so overwhelmingly without the ambitions of Porto Alegre. This was a global trend.[36] As Sintomer and others have shown, vastly different designs and models spread across Europe, often with the purpose of administrative modernisation, fiscal transparency and consultative aims.[37] More recent research concluded that "in none of the [European] countries the development of participatory budgeting is a natural bottom-up process, where officials work together with citizens to apply an innovative instrument."[38] The diffusion of participatory budgeting across local administrations in European countries also arrived with the rise of new public management reforms in many countries. **These reforms attempted to shift hierarchical considerations of government to horizontal distributions of governance, amidst both the de-regulation of public administrations in certain countries and processes of decentralisation.**[39] It is within this broader shift in the governance and nature of modern European states that some thinkers advanced a role for participatory initiatives and **democratic innovations as a functional way to solve practical problems.**[40] Researchers have debated whether this shift in governance enabled outsourcing of public responsibilities and decision-making, whilst casting and enlisting citizens as consumers and civil society as *the* stakeholder for the public good; or whether this was driven by a need for cities to capture global flows of capital in the 1990s and early 2000s.[41] Though the diagnoses of these narratives differ considerably, the weight of existing research suggests that the predominantly used purpose of participatory governance methods is to often enable depoliticised forms of good governance and legitimate existing institutions through better constructed and delivered policies.[42]

These developments were accompanied by a shift in the ecology of actors involved. Democratic innovations have been characteristically state-driven or driven and/or commissioned by international organisations. In Latin America, for instance 68% of all such innovations between

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[33] World Bank (1996).
[34] Mansuri and Rao (2012) ix.
[35] Ganuza and Baiocchi (2012).
[36] Wampler and Goldfrank (2022).
[37] Sintomer et al. (2008).
[38] Nemec et al. (2022) 310.
[39] This is also seen in Latin America, see Goldfrank (2011).
[40] Sabel et al. (1999).
[41] Harvey (2007).
[42] Fung (2015).

1990–2020 have been driven by the government, though recent years have seen a decline in this.[43] Democratic innovations, today, are advanced by a greater variety of actors with differentiated interests – from international and national funding foundations to coalitions of issue-specific CSOs, consultancies and a wide range of international organisations that create, advocate for and implement democratic innovations. This produces a certain political economy.[44]

Vexed questions of the purposes and ideals of democratic innovations returned in the mid-2010s. The impetus for this has been five related developments: i) the pressing need to diagnose the drivers of democratic erosion across Europe and parts of the globe; ii) a popular contemporary enthusiasm for citizens' assemblies (below);[45] iii) an uptake of participatory governance reforms by movement parties coming to power in local administrations across Southern Europe in the mid-late 2010s; iv) the unpredictable, cascading effects of now normalised complex multiple crises requires a relational state; and v) the simultaneously urgent need to deepen and transform democracy to ensure just twin green and digital transitions.[46]

The ensuing task asked of democratic innovations is a demanding one: *can democratic innovations meaningfully **guard against democratic erosion** whilst also **renewing and making our democracies more resilient** through this period of transitions?* In this lies a palpable tension between defending and renewing democracies. Initiatives produced under the European Democracy Action Plan and other policy circles often replicate this tension. The former has been dominated by the imaginary of defence, with the Defence of Democracy Package announced in December 2023 and more recently the adoption of the European Democracy Shield. Both policy initiatives rest on the problematic assumption that threats to European democracy largely emerge from external actors and factors, and/or their influence in Central and Eastern European countries such as Georgia and Hungary, amongst others.

The difficult nature of the question posed to the field is that it requires, as researchers have noted, for the field to grapple with unsuitable questions and frames, such as "the overarching reasons why democracy is falling apart."[47] Part of the issue here is **whether democratic innovations treat, or are capable of treating, root causes or symptoms of democratic malaise** in a particular context, or indeed whether they compensate for broader democratic erosion (as noted on participatory budgeting in Poland, Hungary and Slovenia).[48] This depends on a consensus about said root causes of democratic malaise and erosion.

A loose consensus of root causes has emerged along two lines in recent years. For CSOs, deliberative democrats and practitioners there seems to be an underlying belief that **citizens are socially and politically alienated from the communities, rules, institutions and various publics that shape their lives**. The argument goes that this leads to both unproductive forms

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[43] Pogrebinschi (2021) 20.

[44] Bherer et al. (2017); Henriks and Carson (2008).

[45] This enthusiasm has crossed politicians, political commentary, simplified public debate, as well as academia and policymaking circles, see e.g. Sintomer (2023); Landemore (2020); Chwalisz (2022); Wolf (2023); Monbiot (2024); Talmadge (2023).

[46] B. Geissel, *The Future of Self-Governing, Thriving Democracies: Democratic Innovations By, With and For the People* (Routledge, 2022).

[47] Youngs (2022) 4.

[48] Nemec et. al. (2022) 308.

of populism and affective polarisation. This lens allows for innovative practices in third spaces and the desire to form publics, whilst also challenging the twin tendencies of technocracy and depoliticisation in both institutions and processes.

Influential work done by the OECD narrows this broad diagnosis of social and political alienation to a question of **democratic governance.** This second line of argument traces democratic erosion and its cures to levels of public trust in public institutions.[49] This largely frames the purpose of embedding participatory and deliberative processes as a necessary step to responsive and competent public institutions. In turn, over the long-term this can develop trust in said institutions, which can, the argument proceeds, "safeguard **democratic resilience**."[50] There is, however, little research to support the conclusion that this goal is a feasible one.[51] Despite the (perhaps limited) merits of its normative possibility, Archon Fung noted in 2015 that "we do not yet know whether such efforts [of enhancing citizen participation] can indeed help to repair the legitimacy of democratic governance processes."[52]

As democratic innovations become increasingly used and embedded in administrations and societies, so too do the ideals and purposes ascribed to them. This section has briefly shown how these ideals and purposes have changed over geographies, time and different innovations. The use of democratic innovations to pursue redistributive social justice goals has receded in those parts of the world where it once flourished and has been conspicuously absent in Europe. **Particularly influential rationals have been policy efficacy, especially amidst complex or 'wicked' policy concerns,** where representative justice has come to prominence and the long-term legitimation of public institutions. As citizens' assemblies have captured the contemporary imagination, they have tended to reinforce these economies of purpose. Assemblies are embraced for their ability to promote policy efficacy for complex and politically sensitive problems, to complement and often legitimate existing institutions of representative democracy, and on a small scale, in-assembly, to grapple with social antagonisms and address representative injustices.

What are democratic innovations for? This section has shown how democratic innovations have historically been used for different, sometimes complementary and often antagonistic ends. The deep conflicts between these ends – and their embedding into governance structures – are rarely made explicit. And irrespective of the chosen ends of democratic innovations, a great deal depends on who ultimately benefits. Chosen ends tend to shape how democratic innovations are embedded in governance structure and policy cycles, the depth and meaningfulness of the participation they seek and the reformist ambitions of policymakers who use them. To both unravel and be explicit about the normative conflict between the ends of democratic innovations and their institutionalisation is where political conversations about their legitimacy and value lie. Not to mention their potential for deep and long-lasting societal transformation.

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[49] OECD (2024); OECD (2022c).
[50] OECD (2023) 18–26.
[51] Some preliminary evidence is emerging that this is a possible outcome for citizens' assemblies participants, see Wappenhans et al. (2024) (for citizens' assemblies in Germany).
[52] Fung (2015) 9.

More immediately, from the point of view of those implementing them: **what can and ought democratic innovations be for today?** Theoretical and empirical research has shown how contemporary Western democracies are liable to safeguard structural injustices and inequalities of power and wealth. Iris Young spoke of the need to closely entwine questions of democracy and socio-economic justice and Carole Pateman has shown how the latter can be undermined in the name of democratic participation.[53] Democracy is a form of social order where the simultaneous pursuit of justice and the pursuit of depoliticised harmony of interests is neither desirable nor possible.[54] Recent research has questioned whether the malaise of democracies is better explained by economic inequalities, the depoliticisation of powerful economic institutions and the concentration of economic power in the hands of an elite minority.[55] Whilst comparative empirical research for European countries is emerging on the ways that economic inequalities translate into political inequalities and unequal responsiveness, especially through existing institutions of representative democracies.[56] In short, today, any answer to the question of what democratic innovations are for requires that they grapple with complex structural questions of (in)justice and redistribution of power.

Historical examples at considerable scale show us that democratic innovations *can* be integral for long-term societal transformations (see also section 5.2 below). To sustain this possibility and harness it for today's world it is necessary to:

- grasp the scope, spread, ends and functions of democratic innovations (section 3.2 below);
- sustain open political debates about the ends and purposes of embedded democratic innovations;
- rediscover and reinscribe their radically egalitarian roots in redistributive socio-economic justice ideals, governance structures and policies;
- inscribe these roots into governance structures and public institutions, do both better their legitimacy and challenge it; and
- to see democratic innovations as tools for creating societal publics beyond public institutions.

3.2. Five trends of scale, scope and spread across Europe

Globally there has been a substantial proliferation in the uptake of democratic innovations over the last three decades. Databases across the field confirm this trend. These datasets are often premised on different definitions of democratic innovations, geographies and timescales, and often explore several types or specific types of innovation. In turn, this makes it difficult to accurately and comprehensively grasp the scope and scale of growth of these innovations, across the globe and regions. For instance, premised on a very specific understanding of

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[53] Young (2002); Pateman (2012).
[54] Mouffe (2000) 137.
[55] Bergsen et al. (2022).
[56] See e.g. on parliaments in unequal responsiveness in Europe, Persson (2024).

democratic innovations, the LATINNO database recorded an often-steady growth of participatory and deliberative democratic innovations between 1990 and 2020 in Latin America, totalling 3744 cases.[57] Premised on submissions and entirely different data collection, the Participedia database holds records for 2292 cases of participatory innovations and citizen engagement across the globe.[58]

In this section we bring together existing sources and database results to identify some of the main trends of scale, scope and spread of deliberative innovations and participatory budgeting.

Trend 1. Deliberative innovations and participatory budgeting initiatives have grown considerably in Europe, but declined in growth in recent years

According to the OECD, certain deliberative democratic innovations, such as citizens' assemblies, juries and councils have grown to 800 cases between 1979-2023 reaching across 34 countries, largely belonging to the OECD (figure 3, below). These processes have included a total of 11,812 citizens by 2023 across the population of 34 countries. In contrast, the POLITICIZE database identified and analysed 105 deliberative mini-publics across 18 European countries between 2000-2020,[59] rising to 159 by 2024. The SFB1265 database, current to 19 November 2021, provides systemic documentation of 2169 mini-publics across the world. This form of data collection has enabled a deeper examination of their composition, methods, formats, commissioning and impact.[60] **The OECD and POLITICIZE databases show a considerable rise in the use and uptake of deliberative democratic innovations and more recently,**

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[57] Pogrebinschi (2021) 20. The definition adopted is from Pogrebinschi (2023), which is distinct from that used by this report: "institutions, processes, and mechanisms whose end it is to enhance democracy by means of citizen participation in at least one stage of the policy cycle."
[58] Participedia (18 February 2025).
[59] Paulis et al. (2022).
[60] E.g. the use of the OECD database to identify who commissioned deliberative democratic innovations, see Ramis-Moyano et al. (2025).

year-upon-year drops in yearly numbers between 2021–2023.

Figure: **The deliberative wave continues to grow**

Number of representative deliberative processes over time (total per year), 1979-2023
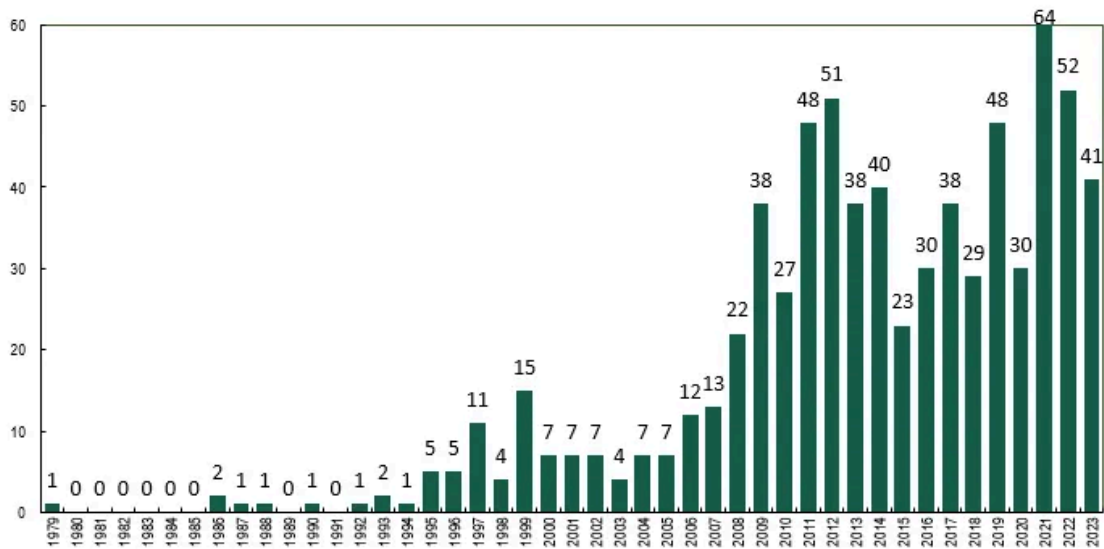
Note: n=733; Processes that spanned over multiple years noted by the year of their completion (except for permanent ongoing processes). For 2023, additional 16 cases were submitted but were not included as were still in progress during the data validation stage.
Source: OECD Deliberative Democracy Database (2023).

Figure 2. OECD's deliberative wave 1979–2023.
Source: Mejia (2023) extrapolated from OECD (2023a).

The use of participatory budgeting initiatives across the globe has also rapidly declined since 2019. The latest dataset from the World Atlas noted that in 2019 the number of initiatives stood at 10,081. Only 4,032 remained active during the pandemic.[61] Researchers have termed this the "great suspension." Of these remaining initiatives over 50% continued to take place within Europe (see Figure 4 below).

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[61] Dias et al. (2021) 17.

Number of active PB's
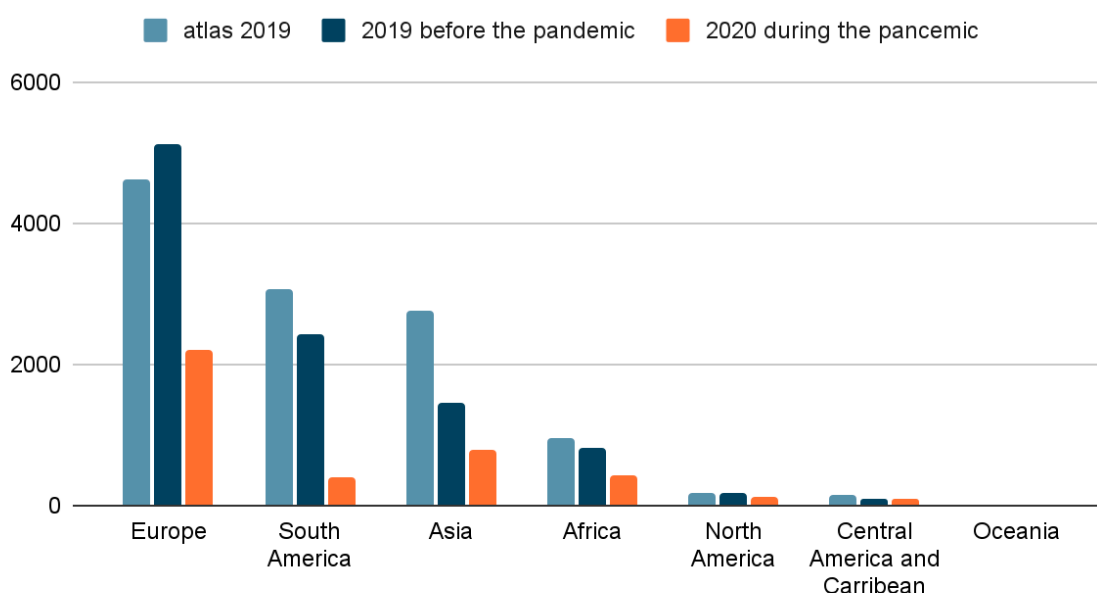
Figure 3. Number and geographic distribution of active participatory budgeting initiatives before and after the pandemic.
Source: Dias et. al (2021).

The recent reversal in the proliferation of democratic innovations across Europe also reflects developments elsewhere. Latin America, for instance, has seen a rapid decrease in the use and uptake of democratic innovations since 2016 (with a temporary uptick in 2020). Across the region, 68% of democratic innovations have been state-led and commissioned between 1990–2020 and the recent decrease in use may not solely be attributable to the "end of the so-called left turn in Latin America."[62]

Trend 2. An overwhelming majority of democratic innovations take place at local government levels, though 'local' is being dynamically reconceived

Democratic innovations are firmly rooted in local democracy. The substantial growth we have seen in deliberative innovations and participatory budgeting across Europe has overwhelmingly taken place at sub-national levels.

When participatory budgeting was recorded at its peak in 2019, only 4 of 10,081 initiatives worldwide occurred within national governments. Portugal was a European forerunner.[63] 324 or 3.2% of these have occurred at the level of regional government. Initiatives at this level of governance have strengthened in recent years. Participatory budgeting initiatives in local government account for 79.1% of all initiatives worldwide, with a leading role ascribed to large cities for the growth and dissemination of participatory budgeting. **Across Europe, local**

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[62] Pogrebinschi (2021) 20–21
[63] Dias et al. (2021) 17; Dias et al. (2019) 45 (identifying 7 countries with national participatory budgeting).

government participatory budgeting accounts for 67.7% of a total of 5113 initiatives and only 1 experiment has been conducted at a national level.

Till the end of 2023, the OECD deliberative democracy database shows that 101 out of a total of 733 cases took place for governance at the national level. These are a nascent trend. Of the total 16 experiments have been conducted for supranational levels of governance and 149 at the regional level. **According to the OECD database, 63.7% of all deliberative democratic innovations occur at local levels of governance**.

The relationship between democratic innovations and local administration is a dynamic one. In recent years there are three ways in which 'local' governance is being practically reconceptualised. First, debates centre on how local communities can be democratically empowered through participatory innovations. In some countries, this takes the hew of **how power can be devolved from local authorities to even more localised community public institutions or communities** and/or how this devolution of power can be strategically coordinated at higher/more centralised levels of governance.[64] Second, practitioners increasingly see **local governance as lying beyond formal public administrations**. For instance, in participatory budgeting discussions, there is an effort to identify the use of its basic principles in the functioning of other local institutions such as schools, universities, companies and prisons.[65] In 2019 these accounted for 15% of all participatory budgeting initiatives worldwide.[66] This conceptually stretches what falls under this category and multiplies the spheres and spaces for socialisation in democratic practices. Deliberative democratic innovations are also increasingly being used in work–places, pension–funds and other local contexts (see section 5.2 below).[67]

Finally, **local concerns being addressed at local levels of governance are being transformed into transnational considerations due to the nature of contemporary challenges**. Here local concerns are deliberated upon with other localities across different countries, where similar or related issues are being faced. In Latin America, the LATINNO database in 2020 identified 131 cases of such transnational democratic innovations.[68] In Europe, beyond European Citizen Initiatives, consultations and citizens panels, a different form has emerged in a travelling transnational assembly. Entitled the Democratic Odyssey, it comprises an effort to connect citizens across borders.[69]

Trend 3. Democratic innovations are increasingly institutionalised, though this remains an Achilles heel

To institutionalise democratic innovations is, as discussed, distinct from embedding them. Institutionalisation typically involves differently and/or simultaneously: (a) enabling legislation establishing and for democratic innovations; or (b) a permanent institution with jurisdiction and a mandate over said implementation; and/or (c) permanent governance structures that evaluate

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[64] IPPR North (2024).
[65] Dias et al. (2021) 35.
[66] Dias et al. (2019) 45.
[67] Cooper et al. (2024) (on 'hyperlocalism' in the United Kingdom).
[68] Pogrebinschi (2021) 24.
[69] See https://democraticodyssey.eui.eu/home (last accessed 20 February 2025).

and learn from instances. It is widely argued that a lack of institutionalisation hampers the sustainability and impact of democratic innovations. For instance, across Latin America, only 29% of democratic innovations between 1990–2020 were found to be enabled by constitutional provisions or legislation.[70] This resulted, for the authors of this report, a low ability to produce binding decisions.

A global study on participatory budgeting initiatives in 2019 found that **74% of all participatory budgeting initiatives across Europe till then were enabled by legislation and regulation**. Because these initiatives existed in two countries, both of which had national legislation.[71] Across the world in 2019, enabling legislation exists for 58% of the world's total participatory budgeting initiatives, due to being concentrated in nine countries. Research also found that the institutionalisation of participatory budgeting significantly influenced the expansive use and uptake of such initiatives.[72] Today, the vast majority of participatory budgeting initiatives worldwide are backed and enabled by regulation, even if the coterie of countries remains rather small.[73]

The OECD has identified a trend of increasing institutionalisation of deliberative democratic innovations at local and regional levels (see Figure 4 below). Over 3 years between 2020–2023, the number of democratic innovations that have been institutionalised has nearly doubled from 22 to 41 out of 733 cases.

Figure: **Permanent public deliberation is on the rise**
Number of institutionalized or permanent representative deliberative processes over time

Note: n=41;
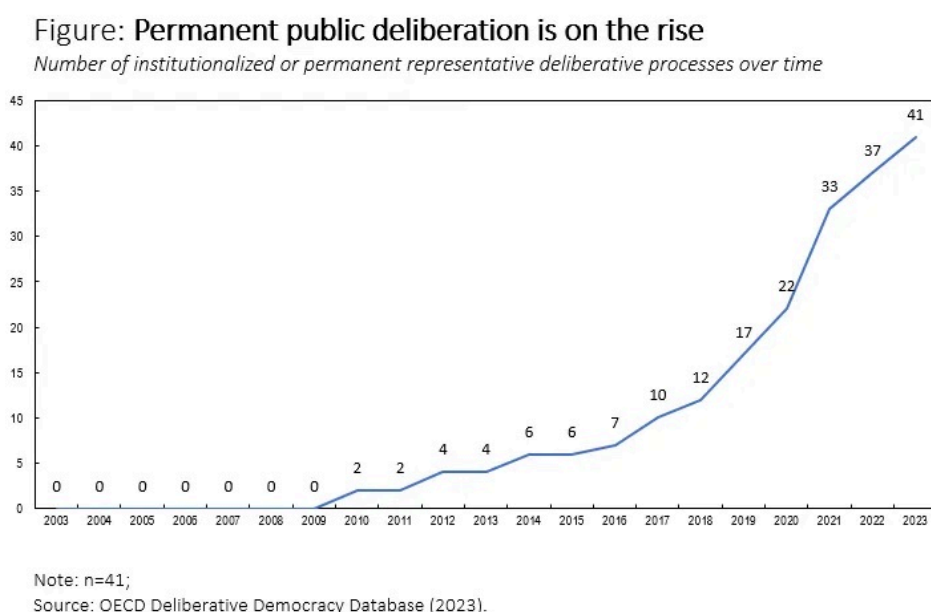Source: OECD Deliberative Democracy Database (2023).

Figure 4. Trends in the institutionalisation of deliberative democratic institutions.
Source: Mejia (2023) based on data from OECD (2023a)

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[70] Pogrebinschi (2021) 25.
[71] Dias et al. (2019) 50.
[72] Dias et al. (2019) 48–50.
[73] Dias et al. (2021).

Trend 4. Democratic innovations are unevenly distributed across Europe and governance systems

Different democratic innovations have flourished in distinct political and cultural systems. Predispositions to the type of societal participation that flourishes in certain political and cultural systems affect both the dissemination and function of democratic innovations in a given country.

In 2019, 85% of all participatory budgeting worldwide occurred in the category of imperfect democracies, whilst 4-5% in full-fledged democracies and 4-5% in hybrid regimes.[74] In 2021, it was estimated that 90% of all participatory budgeting initiatives in Europe occurred in Eastern and Southern European countries.[75] Of these Poland, Portugal and Spain have been the most influential in the dissemination of participatory budgeting across the globe.

Explanations for these trends are lacking. Researchers have congregated around certain hypotheses. For instance, fully-fledged democracies may not see participatory budgeting as a tool relevant to the problems they face, since they provide adequate or good standards of living for their citizens.[76] This may also explain why it has largely appeared in consultative guise in some liberal democracies (e.g. Germany and Sweden). Researchers have also noted that increased use of participatory budgeting in Poland, Hungary and Slovenia has occurred alongside national backsliding, as a "kind of compensation for the deterioration of national democratic practices."[77] Another hypothesis offered by researchers is that hybrid regimes may use participatory budgeting to offer a space for limited dialogue, principles of good governance and administrative transparency, but ultimately earmark a small amount of funds and use this innovation for the legitimation of existing institutions.[78]

In contrast to the geographical concentration of participatory budgeting, deliberative democratic innovations have burgeoned in what are widely considered prosperous liberal democracies in Europe. Of a total of 733 instances recorded in 34 countries between 1979-2023 by the OECD, seven such European countries accounted for 41% of the total – Germany (81), the United Kingdom (55), Austria (45), France (42), Denmark (40), Belgium (29) and the Netherlands (21).[79] The precise correlation between the proliferation and success of citizens' assemblies and the strong liberal institutional background in which they have flourished, remains underexplored. It does throw into sharp relief the expectations put in such innovations and their potential utility in distinct democratic settings, such as in hybrid or authoritarian regimes (see Chapter 6 below).

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[74] Dias et al. (2019) 41.
[75] Dias et al. (2021) 51-58.
[76] Dias et al. (2019) 42.
[77] Nemec et al. (2022) 308.
[78] Dias et al. (2019) 42.
[79] OECD (2023).

Trend 5. Increased use of deliberative innovations to address long-term, complex, technical and politically-sensitive policy problems

Democratic innovations have historically suffered from the problem of triviality.[80] This is an umbrella concern for the belief that perhaps participation is not meaningful because it pertains to so-called park bench problems, or the real needs of citizens are neglected or indeed, that insufficient resources are allocated to problems. In relation to the first two of these dimensions, democratic innovations are increasingly used to address a broader scope of social questions and policy areas.

Democratic innovations such as citizens' assemblies have long been used to address complex political and social questions, as reflected in their use in British Columbia in 2004 and the drafting of Iceland's constitution in 2011. They are increasingly being used in areas as diverse as health care, policing, electoral reform, strategic planning, urban planning and policy areas emerging as key to a just transition. The social policy areas of focus for participatory budgeting are unknown since consolidated national and comparative data is largely lacking.

In 2023, the OECD identified the considerable use of deliberative innovations in long-term policy areas ranging from strategic and urban planning to recommendations relating to just transitions (see Figure 5). 32% of new cases between 2021 to 2023 relate to the last of these.[81]

Figure: **Deliberation is being used to solve long term issues, in particular environmental topics**

Number of times a policy issue has been addressed through a representative deliberative process

Note: n=733; Various include all the permanent processes as they regularly address different policy issues. Other include agriculture; consumer protection; migration; water management; youth.
Source: OECD Deliberative Democracy Database (2023).

Figure 5. Policy issues used for deliberative democratic innovations.
Source: Mejia (2023) based on data from OECD (2023a).

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[80] Fung (2015) 9.
[81] Mejia (2023).

The POLITICIZE database covering deliberative mini-publics between 2000-2020 also identified three distinct phases of the types of issues covered (see Figure 7 below). Between 2000-2005 the most debated policy issues related to health and science-related development. This was particularly pronounced in Denmark, France and Germany. Since approximately 2010 issues relating to the environment, mobility, transport and urban planning become frequent. Between 2015-2020 long-term institutional and constitutional issues were frequently considered in, for example, Ireland, Finland, Estonia, Iceland and Scotland.[82]
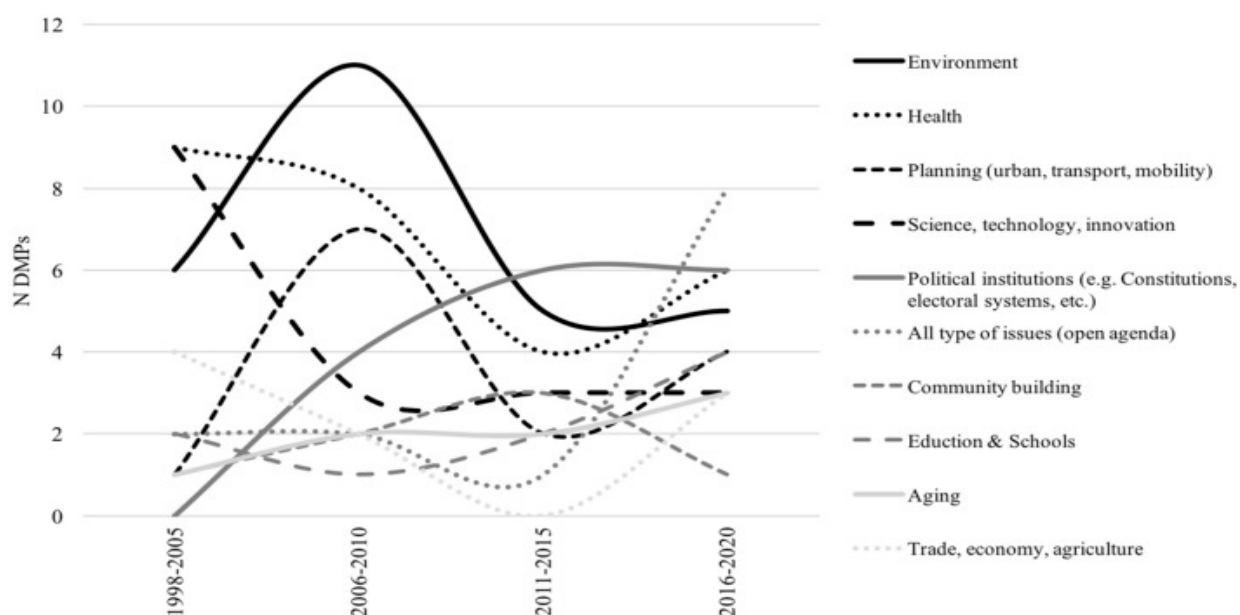
Figure 6. Change of main policy area over time for DMPs in POLITICIZE database.
Source: Paulis et al. (2021).

The evolution of the types of issues for which deliberative democratic innovations are used is to be lauded. Increased attention to long-term policy issues says little, however, about how these issues are being approached. For example, in the realm of just climate transitions, it remains an open question how deliberative innovations are being used in such a highly technical, managerialised and technocratic policy area.

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[82] Paulis et al. (2021) 537.

4. Embedding democratic innovations into public administrations

Key Insights:

❖ A long-term and strategic commitment to changing governance cultures within public administrations motivates senior participatory civil servants.

❖ Senior participatory civil servants identified 5 core challenges to embedding democratic innovations into administrations: (1) Organisational inertia; (2) Financial and competence constraints across levels of governance; (3) Distrust of citizens' capabilities amongst policymakers and politicians; (4) Marginalisation of participatory initiatives; and (5) Burnout amongst participatory civil servants.

❖ Diverse and inter-institutional alliances of participatory policymakers are integral to nurturing citizen participation within administrations.

❖ Narratives of democratic innovations that situationally centre policy efficacy, efficiency and legitimation of existing leadership and institutions are best placed to build broad alliances and political authorisation.

❖ A robust evidence base for the efficacy and impact of democratic innovations is needed to plug existing evidential gaps and complement limited existing advocacy strategies.

❖ A wide variety of legal norms are already defining, guiding and enforcing the use of participation in administrations; participation laws may be a necessary but insufficient tool for embedding democratic innovations.

"You can have the most progressive ideas of the world, but then they need to walk on the legs of civil servants and in some cases, I realized for example, it wasn't even an issue of they don't want to do [participatory policies]. They are not against you. It is just that you speak different languages."

Former senior civil servant, Messina

Some of the promises of democratic innovations can be realised if they are effectively and meaningfully woven into the fabric of public institutions and their decision-making processes.

This task of transforming public institutions – their capacities, cultures and processes – to embed citizen participation is as difficult as it is essential.

This section **outlines some of the core perspectives, attitudes and needs of senior participatory civil servants at local, national and supranational levels of governance**. Its data is gathered from both semi-structured interviews and complemented by existing policy and peer-reviewed research. Policy literature has long focused on how participation can be embedded in local administration,[83] with limited policy work emerging for national administrations and the European Union.[84] This chapter adds to, draws from and reframes some of this existing policy work based on key insights gleaned from our interviews with policymakers.

The senior participatory civil servants interviewed for this report were **primarily focused on the complex, strategic and long-term goal of fostering a culture change towards participatory methods within governmental institutions**.

> *"National systemic change around [participation and] voting systems and municipal structures is generational. That will take more than the lifetime of this administration … democratic reform at a structural level is slow to nothing in the UK."*
>
> *Civil servant, Camden Town*

> *"Participatory governance requires a deep culture change. A change in disposition. There is little appetite for this."*
>
> *Senior civil servant and academic, EU institution*

Interviewees argued that **securing and embedding participatory governance within public administration requires a change in culture**. For civil servants established in this field, this is a long-term strategic and complex commitment to changing the attitudes, dispositions and values of fellow policymakers, politicians and societal actors. Nearly all interviewees understood this to be the necessary, problematic and improbable purpose of their everyday labour. Other interviewees argued against centring the import of the culture within public administrations. The culture within the civil service is engendered, for these interviewees, by shifts in political

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[83] Edgar and Baeck (2023); Whittington (2022).

[84] At national levels the work of Open Government Partnership (OGP) on 'mainstreaming participation' has been exceptional, see
<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-gov-guide/open-government-foundations-mainstreaming-participation/> (accessed 25 February 2025). For the United Kingdom, see Levin et al. (2024). For the European Union see, CEPS-SWP High-Level Group on Bolstering EU Democracy (2023); Youngs (2022).

leadership and often broader societal cultural predispositions. This, however, does not dispose of the central desire to change cultures, but merely shapes how this could be done.

The tendency to centre a change of governance culture affects how participatory senior civil servants prioritise different levers of change to embed democratic innovations. For instance, support for the **formal procedures of institutionalisation are relegated**. This is especially so at national levels of government and within the European Union. **Institutionalisation may be viewed as both undesirable and unnecessary (and perhaps unfeasible)**. For instance, in Ireland, the societal acceptance of citizens' assemblies without their permanent institutionalisation resulted in a political culture in which parties competed over which issue ought to be the subject of the given assembly.

To put it otherwise: the creation of laws, permanent institutions and soft norms to enable the use of democratic innovations may become tactically subservient to a broader and loosely defined commitment to cultural change.[85] **Institutionalisation may not lead to embedding and indeed, may hamper it** (see also section 2.2). More formal tools of governance such as reforming the constitution, legislation, regulation or secondary rules also become subservient to the goal of a broader culture change in favour of more meaningful citizen participation. Research highlights the apt summary of one policymaker:

> *"Changing participation patterns is not just about changing a rule. It has to do with changing a culture of relationships between actors, a political culture in the city."*

[86]

With a clear-eyed view on the strategic import of changing governance cultures, this section proceeds by first identifying four key challenges to more meaningfully embedding democratic innovations into administrations (section 4.1). It then identifies five distinct sets of practices and needs of participatory senior civil servants (sections 4.2–4.7).

4.1. Five challenges to embedding democratic innovations into administrations

Interviewed civil servants were lucid about the deeply engrained structural constraints in which they work to change administrative cultures. **Clear-sightedness of the depth and effects of these constraints allows for a certain pragmatism amongst participatory civil servants**. This seemed to allow them to identify with hopeful strands of their everyday labour, a clear view

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[85] On participatory laws as a form of institutionalisation, see Lewanski (2013); on institutionalization, see OECD (2021).

[86] Commissioner for Participation for Barcelona, cited in Blanco et al. (2022) 13.

of the key levers to work with, a healthy scepticism, as well as a grasp on enabling practices for embedding democratic innovations.

The structural challenges outlined below are structural in distinct ways. Some relate to cultural structures, others to dominant governance structures and role types, whilst some of these challenges relate to deeply rooted attitudes amongst policymakers in administrations.

Challenge 1. Battling organisational inertia, especially at the local level

"So organisational inertia is a big thing … and often bigger than the institution."

Senior national civil servant, United Kingdom

Research shows that **civil servants are far less likely to initiate participatory initiatives, let alone experiment with them, when they work in local, bureaucratically conservative, top-down and technocratic administrative cultures**.[87] Such cultures are considerably more risk averse, far more routinised and often dependent on formal or semi-formalised procedures. These conservative administrative cultures often persist at national and supranational levels of governance.

In this context, notions of heroic management may also come to dominate. This is an administrative management style governed by the belief that politicians and policymakers already know best what the public wants and needs in any given policy area.[88] In bureaucratically conservative administrative cultures, **civil servants may be prone to tokenistic expressions of participation or take pride when participatory outcomes legitimate existing policy directions**.

"Participation is used casually [by civil servants] and often with ambition in mind…"

Senior civil servant, Ministry, Finland

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[87] Ianniello (2019).
[88] Levin et al. (2024) 22–23; Roberts (1997).

> *"When you have people who have been there, are at the end of their career in the Civil Administration, they are I don't know 55, even 60, and so they had worked for their whole entire life in the city Administration with a logic, to change this logic, to switch to something new is of course extremely problematic."*
>
> *Former senior civil servant, Messina*

Interviewees clearly articulated the findings of research in local administrations: **risk–averse and technocratic administrations** are less likely to properly adopt, let alone deepen citizen participation. Other research shows that such administrations often focus on strengthening the existing roles and policy priorities of civil servants. **There is little desire to govern with citizens, let alone share or redistribute power.**[89] Within such organisational cultures, even when democratic innovations take a foothold or pockets of experimentation are found, the spread and depth of these participatory methods are remarkably slow.

Challenge 2. Financial and competence constraints across levels of governance

> *"I mean even the smallest things [for citizen engagement] mean you need money. And if you can't spend it, this is an issue. This is a big issue."*
>
> *Former senior civil servant, Messina*

Financial resources for public administrations at national and local levels are increasingly scarce.[90] This leads to considerable **trade–offs on whether and where participatory forms of governance are used**.

The financial expenditure of local administrations is also often subject to regulatory limitations, where core funding arrives allocated by higher levels of governance and discretionary funds are nominal. The **distribution of competencies between different levels of governance in European countries varies significantly**.[91] Even with this caveat in mind, a number of interviewees identified that the loss of substantive and financial competencies in local government severely hampered the prioritisation of participatory policymaking.

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[89] Koskimaa and Rapeli (2020); Schiffino et al. (2019).
[90] European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2018).
[91] European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. (2017).

> *"City governments are less and less autonomous. We don't have influence over our education systems … our hospitals. So the area of responsibility for the municipality is decreasing very rapidly since the beginning of this century and especially since 2010. … The other thing is that municipalities have very limited access to tax income that has been produced in their territory. … Even if financial resources would be in abundance, the state would mark their purpose [and they] would be tagged which really reduces the budgetary autonomy of a municipality and affects the ability to set our priorities."*
>
> *Senior civil servant, municipality in Budapest*

In conditions of fiscal austerity, **an evidentiary and cost-driven approach to using democratic innovations becomes essential to championing them** (see section 4.4 below). Yet, as some interviewees noted, this is a chicken and egg problem. Not only do some participatory methods cost significant sums – the Irish citizens' assembly on gender equality ran for 2.5 years and cost an estimated £1,15 million in total[92] – but the processes of collecting evidence of these democratic innovations can cost 5–10 times more than routine or accepted policy evaluations.[93]

A national policymaker hinted at one route out of this circular logic: **auditing the fiscal costs of policy failure could help make a case for certain democratic innovations**. Such an argument could have remarkable traction in an era of societal transformations. For instance, the route to net zero requires remarkable levels of state investment and significant buy-in and commitment from the broader public. The fiscal, social and political costs for policy failure in the realm are hard to imagine and quantify but would undoubtedly be ameliorated by developing a social mandate through participatory approaches.

For now, however, increasing fiscal and governance constraints result in stunted, if pragmatic, ambitions for using and embedding democratic innovations.

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[92] See <https://citizensassembly.ie/overview-previous-assemblies/assembly-on-gender-equality/procurement-costs/> (accessed 1 August 2024)
[93] Rask et al. (2021).

> *"When we entered into office in 2019, we knew that the budgetary situation of the city was not very good. So even if we wanted to we couldn't have really done bigger developments and I think our approach anyway is not to do fancy developments, but to do low budget things which have high impact, and … small modifications that enhance the quality of life in the city and I think as part of this we had to show that there is a different approach to politics which is based on citizens participation."*
>
> *Senior civil servant, municipality in Budapest*

Challenge 3. Countering elite scepticism: deeply engrained distrust and fear of citizens

Interviewed participatory civil servants repeatedly spoke of needing to counter a deep-seated distrust of citizens' capacity to meaningfully contribute to policy. This distrust is reportedly rife amongst fellow policymakers and politicians and attached less to the methods of democratic innovations than the motivations and capacities of citizens themselves. This prevailing attitude amongst other policymakers and sceptical politicians was often rooted in the belief that citizens' had a lack of sufficient knowledge, were blissfully unaware of the harsh realities of governance and its necessary trade-offs, and were likely to pursue individualised interests or grievances.

Emerging research from Finland supports this sense of elite scepticism towards citizen participation.[94] It shows that 1 in 5 decision-makers trust that the general public has the capacity to participate in policy-making discussions (not decisions).[95] Similar evidence of elite scepticism of citizens' engagement has emerged in Australia and Sweden.[96] Research in Scottish health policy highlights that this scepticism is not always of the same order. Health policy specialists expressed positive regard for citizen participation and citizen capabilities, but they did not trust the public to enact transformative changes that would battle health inequalities.[97]

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[94] Koskimaa et al. (2024) 272–73.
[95] Jämsén et al. (2022).
[96] Hartz-Karp and Briand (2009) 186; Åström (2020).
[97] McHugh et al. (2023).

> *"We didn't have the naive idea of participation: because people participate … this doesn't necessarily mean that there will be a progressive policy if people participate. … No. … So for us it was clear that we needed to enable the participation of citizens because we believed in that but at the same time we also needed to have some political process that could also encourage progressive positions."*
>
> *Former senior civil servant, Messina*

Interviewees also identified policymaker **fear as a key driver of distrust in citizens**. Some interviewees suggested that both civil servants and politicians were afraid to face citizens or incorporate participation into policy ideas for **fear of public backlash**. The personal and professional consequences for politicians and civil servants alike may be considered too dire.

> *"... all of that then adds up to: it just not really worth people's while to step out and take a risk."*
>
> *Senior civil servant, United Kingdom*

Researchers suggest that this fear may be particularly aggravated during a time when public discourse is rife with bureaucracy–bashing.[98] Interviewees also noted that other policymakers regularly expressed a **fear of the loss of control** over the policy process and outcome, as well as in one's institutional standing. For these other policymakers and politicians, this was simply too high a price to pay.

Challenge 4. Marginalisation of participatory departments and processes

Several interviewees spoke of the different ways in which participatory governance is marginalised in administrations. **More often than not citizen participation is not seen as a priority in policymaking**. In those rare cases where political or administrative leadership did prioritise it – for example during the last term of the European Commission – fellow civil servants reportedly deprioritised it for more important strategic priorities. Citizen participation through the use of democratic innovations was often viewed as marginally useful and often unnecessary. In other cases, this sense of marginalisation persists even when senior civil servants hold leading roles and participatory teams/departments were built into and across organisations structures of the administration.[99] **Participation departments are often**

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[98] Migchelbrink and De Walle (2022) 14–15; Liao and Schachter (2018).
[99] Whittingdon (2022) 48.

culturally and practically siloed even when the organisational governance of administrations considers them to be properly integrated.

Challenge 5. Burnout and institutional churn of participatory civil servants

Civil servants working with participatory methods and democratic innovations reported significantly high levels of burnout. This is also reflected in existing research.[100] The result of administrations being highly reliant on individuals and susceptible to rolling changes to personnel – and the knock-on effect on capacities, skills and resources. This is unsurprising when elements of their labour are examined. Namely, working against the dominant grain of institutional culture, the work of dis-embedding old ways of working whilst forging new ones, participatory methods exerting minimal influence at the margins, all amidst the relational labour of advocating for (see section 4.3 below), constructing and delivering participatory practices. Interviewed **civil servants spoke of working towards change at complex institutional interstices through dynamic tensions and pressures** that often arose in the course of their work and institutions.[101]

One such tension was temporal. **Interviewed civil servants have in most cases worked for and towards participatory governance for decades and have reflected on twin temporalities for change**. On the one hand, the slow, incremental, and cyclical nature of change in the field of participatory governance. On the other hand, this long-term and strategic outlook was coupled with the need to grasp unexpected moments of possibility. A certain tactical nimbleness for short-term opportunism[102] requires these civil servants to be agile and responsive to e.g. changes in political leadership and societal crises creating unexpected tipping points.

> *"I think we have a leadership crisis in this country and in other countries as well …"*
>
> *Fully anonymised interviewee*

A second tension relates to the key relationships of senior civil servants. This may result from some changes in the operating environments of public administrations over the last decade. First, the nature and number of civil servants' legitimacy relationships have transformed. The primary relationship between civil servants and elected representatives has frayed in many contexts, often due to declining the level of political integrity or the presence of constitutionally dangerous political leaders. This has led civil servants to take unprecedented public steps to hold politicians accountable (e.g. in the United Kingdom during the COVID-19 pandemic, the first and second iteration of the Trump administration, and the foreign service civil servants in Finland under the current government). This has further exacerbated the natural tension between the roles of politicians and civil servants. Additionally, civil servants have increasingly

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[100] Escobar (2021) 155.
[101] Mahoney and Thelen (2010).
[102] de Certeau (1984).

found themselves in the spotlight of public discourse amidst polarised societies.[103] This **slow redefinition and erosion of the relationships between administrators and elected representatives** have continued despite strong adherence to the norm of neutrality among administrators. This is partly due to the relative strength of competing administrative norms of openness and integrity. The tension between neutrality and openness has become particularly acute for participatory governance practices.[104] These tensions also create challenges in administrator–public and administrator–administrator relationships, adding further complexity to the participatory civil servant's role.

4.2. Diverse and resilient alliances are integral to embedding democratic innovations

Despite the sentiment just expressed, a necessary part of the antidote to these challenges lies in the difficult work of building diverse and resilient alliances.

> *"It's about building a movement actually."*
> *Senior civil servant United Kingdom*

Several interviewees mentioned the importance of emerging practices of spaces that remove participatory practices from dependency on the community-building work of one or two individual champions. These alliances, communities and networks offer spaces that are becoming established as they connect policymakers with other champions across government, administration, civil society, consultancy and academia. As such, **alliances provide a locus for professionalisation and productive exchanges** not only across central government but vertically across multiple levels of governance and geographically, with communities from across the globe.

When discussing alliances focused on civic participation and democratic innovations, it is helpful to separate between two forms of communities with partially divergent objectives and functions. First, there is a **strong prevalence of communities of practice within single agencies orl administrations** that act to connect and coordinate activities focused on civic participation within that government. From varying informal and voluntary gatherings of like-minded civil servants to more formalised, clearly mandated, and institutionally established forums of practitioners, all these networks consistently play an integral role in connecting civil servants utilising participatory methods and sharing practical learnings on connecting participatory practices to everyday administrative realities. Some examples of such communities and hubs for participation include:

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[103] Grube (2014).
[104] In Finland for example, the values of technical expertise sit alongside impartiality and independence as well as openness, see Hyry (2023); Dean (2023) 10–12.

COUNTRY	FORM OF CO-ORDINATION	PARTICIPANTS
United Kingdom[105]	Cross-government Participatory Methods Forum coordinated from the UK Cabinet Office	Civil servants across government departments, with an existing focus on strategy teams.
United States[106]	Federal Community of Practice for Crowdsourcing and Citizen Science	Grassroots communities, federal practitioners and leading federal policymakers
Spain[107]	Open Government Forum	Civil servants and government representatives from both national and regional administrations, and civil society actors

Table 2. National Government examples of alliance-building forums. Source: author's own

Second, **sustained international networks provide a collaborative and supportive community for passionate participatory policymakers, advocates and practitioners**. One can further separate between networks focused on civil servants, often contributing significantly to the professionalisation of participatory skills of civil servants and more broad networks and events that connect civil servants and out-of-government practitioners and advocates of participatory methods. While the latter equally act to **create shared learnings and practices across a growing community of participants, they can also be seen as an arena of contestation and advocacy** where advocates are pushing the government towards more participatory practices. Examples of international networks include:

COORDINATOR	NAME OF ALLIANCE	PARTICIPANTS	AIM
OECD	Innovative Citizen Participation Network [108]	Over 100 national and international policymakers, practitioners, civil society representatives, and think tanks	To keep abreast of developments in the field

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[105] See <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2024/04/19/empowering-people-unlocking-democracys-superpower/> (accessed 13 June 2024); on this general policy, National Audit Office, *Lessons learned: Cross-government working* (2023).

[106] See <https://www.citizenscience.gov/about/community-of-practice/#> (accessed 13 June 2024).

[107] See <https://transparencia.gob.es/transparencia/es/transparencia_Home/index/Gobierno-abierto/foro-GA.html> (accessed 28 July 2024).

[108] See <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/open-government-and-citizen-participation/innovative-public-participation.html> (accessed 3 February 2025).

COORDINATOR	NAME OF ALLIANCE	PARTICIPANTS	AIM
State Councillor of Baden-Württemberg	The European Network for Citizen Participation [109]	Civil servants and politicians interested in strengthening citizen participation in public administration	Aiding in the organisation of policy labs, study visits and an annual workshop
Open Government Partnership	Muti-Stakeholder Forums [110]	Civil society, practitioners, policymakers and think tanks	Mainstreaming participation
Eurocities	The Eurocities Citizens Engagement network [111]	Local administrations and politicians	Brings together and supports learning about evolving practices

Table 3. International networks for alliance-building. Source: author's own.

In addition to these practitioner alliances, coalitions and networks—for instance, Democracy R&D and the new Democracy Foundation—offer the opportunity to collaborate, research, and learn about developments in the professional field of public engagement.

Perhaps most importantly for single participatory civil servants working across the multiple challenges of implementing new practices in government, peer-networks create efficacy and a sense of belonging to a community of actors. While challenging to quantify, this **sense of belonging and community is a powerful sentiment** among interviewees, who repeatedly share issues of challenge and disappointment in their abilities to nurture culture change within their respective contexts.

Alliances, networks, and communities also come with specific problems. Particularly within-government networks and communities can be seen to benefit from formal, senior-level support to strengthen the networks' mandate. While institutional support ensures sustainability and relevance of the network (along with resources of the organisation), several interviewees also shared that such support or stewardship risks confusing a network of practitioners with an actual operative unit responsible for delivering participatory practices throughout government.

More international networks and communities focused on a broader set of participants can be associated with two additional problems. First, especially true to wider networks of actors across government, research, practice and advocacy, the financial sustainability of said

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[109] See <https://beteiligungsportal.baden-wuerttemberg.de/de/informieren/beteiligung-staerken/vernetzen/european-network-on-citizen-participation/> (accessed 3 February 2025).
[110] See <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-gov-guide/open-government-foundations-mainstreaming-participation/#toc_0> and <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/multistakeholder-forums/> (accessed 3 July 2024).
[111] See <https://citizens.eurocities.eu> (accessed 3 February 2025)

networks almost exclusively relies on one-off events and funding limiting possibilities of sharing beyond single gatherings. This is especially true for wider, internationalised, networks of actors government, research, practice and advocacy. Second, **well-established existing networks show a significant bias towards policymakers and practitioners from the Global North**. There seems to be both fewer systemic networks in the Global South and slight inclusion of the knowledge and practices produced by these communities (in contrast with those produced by international organisations operating in those communities) within European networks. An exception is Democracy R&D's South North Learnings.[112] These questions are only just beginning to be considered by policymakers and actors in Europe.[113]

4.3. Narratives that centre policy efficacy, impact and legitimacy build broad alliances to advance participation

If democratic innovations are to be successfully embedded within administrations, an awareness of their benefits needs to be cultivated amongst a wider group of policymakers, politicians and stakeholders. **This broader socialised acceptance is driven by the art of persuasion**. An art which, in turn, is less about merely disseminating better information, reiterating the abstract virtues of renewing democracy or of democratic innovations and participatory policymaking.

> *"Definitely sort of steering clear of the word democracy."*
>
> *Fully anonymised senior civil servant in national government*

> *"You have to bring people along with you."*
>
> *Senior civil servant, Scottish Government*

Interviewed participatory senior civil servants spoke of the **need to develop a keen situational and tactical awareness, so that appropriate and nuanced narratives could be instrumentalised**. This requires the persuasive articulation of specific rather than abstract benefits and implications of democratic innovations.[114] This often entails crafting advice that is both evidence-based and feasible (see section 4.4) *and* framed in language that aligns and resonates with the expectations, interests and values of institutional actors.

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[112] See: <https://democracyrd.org/new-frontiers-project/south-north-learning-snl/> (accessed 29 March 2025).
[113] Nicolaidis and Youngs (2023); Godfrey and Youngs (2022).
[114] For instrumental narratives that could work see Levin et al. (2024) 26–32; Whittingdon (2022) 16.

Interviewees broadly recognised the need for tactical deployment of persuasive narratives when advocating for democratic innovations. This often **requires crafting wording and narratives on the spot, tailored to respond creatively to each new circumstance and actor**. This agility and creativity results from the relatively weak position of the participatory civil servant and of the acceptability of participatory governance.[115]

> *My first experience was in the Democratic Republic of Congo and … it's a very difficult context and when there's very low revenues and most of the work actually or public goods and services are being delivered by NGOs and donors like ourselves. The typical pitch that I used to go for … was about efficiency, collective intelligence and tax revenues which manage to build a good relationship. … I remember then I went with the provincial Governor for dinner [and I asked] did you come from here. He said I am nominated by the central government. I am not from the region. He started saying that it was a bit difficult for him to feel accepted. He felt like somebody forced upon the population. And I argued that participatory budgeting could give you much more legitimacy, … and that's when [he] jumped on … and I think it's still one of the most successful participatory budgeting, one of the most institutionalized participatory budgeting processes.*
>
> *Civil Servant, World Bank*

Narrative agility is also key to nurturing broad political alliances in favour of democratic innovations. Research has shown that ideologically left-wing parties have traditionally been associated with advancing citizen participation,[116] and that left-leaning politicians hold favourable attitudes to deliberative democratic innovations.[117] Leftist ideologies of governing parties have also been crucial to the initial dissemination of participatory budgeting across the globe.[118] However recent research has examined which parties commissioned deliberative democratic innovations across Europe. At the continental level of generality, it found that "**governments ruled by parties all along the ideological spectrum have, to a greater and lesser extent, commissioned DMPs [deliberative mini-publics]**."[119] Country-level analyses across Denmark, the UK, France, Germany, and Austria showed a far more nuanced picture, but this research overwhelmingly showed that new-left or green parties did not influence the spread of the democratic wave in Europe, as left-leaning governments did for participatory budgeting.

Evidence of reaching across the political spectrum when making the case for democratic innovations can be seen in two examples:

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[115] These sorts of tactical stances often result from the relatively weak position of the actor or narrative or justification (one need not take, for instance, a tactical stance on developing narratives when making the case for enfranchisement or elections). On tactics, creativity and the weak position of such actors, see de Certeau (1984).

[116] Fung and Wright (2003).

[117] Jacquet et al. (2022); Junius et al. (2020).

[118] Pogrebinschi (2023); Pogrebinschi (2021).

[119] Ramis-Mayano et al. (2025) 10.

> **City of Helsinki: broad alliances**
>
> Efforts to establish a participation unit in the mid-2010s depended heavily on the strategic use of different narratives for different political audiences. Left-leaning parties were persuaded through narratives centred on citizen inclusion, while right-leaning parties were approached with arguments emphasising efficiency and the effective delivery of government services.

Example 1: Narratives for a broad political alliance in Helsinki

Helsinki highlights how certain values may become associated with participatory methods while others do not, which can influence policy purpose, design, strategic uptake and the potential societal impact of such methods. Another notable example is the City of Budapest where narrative agility has allowed opposition parties to be able to bridge political divides on the issue of citizen participation.

> **Budapest: oppositional alliances**
>
> The introduction of participatory budgeting in some districts of Budapest after 2019 was made possible by aligning the narratives of otherwise fractured opposition parties. Liberal and left-leaning politicians focused on the need for citizens to experience democratic practice, particularly in a context marked by a paternalistic and illiberal state culture. This tactical narrative alignment not only facilitated the implementation of participatory budgeting but also demonstrated how different political factions can be brought together under a shared democratic innovation agenda.

Example 2. Narratives for broad oppositional alliances in Budapest

Civil servants, politicians, political parties, advocates, civil society, and social movements all create and propagate their own narratives around democratic innovations (and hence understandings of democracy). These narratives often serve as the grounds upon which different modes of participatory governance are advocated or contested. Despite the virtues of narrative agility, when democratic actors use specific narratives to advocate for democratic innovations in a given context, they can create institutionally embedded path dependencies and expectations.[120] The tactical use of narratives needs to bear this longer-term strategic viewpoint in mind.

Across the interviews conducted, two key narrative groupings were identified: effective governance and democratic resilience. Each with multiple possible strands of argumentation or tropes. These emerged as persuasive narratives for participatory policymakers when attempting to bring along fellow administrators or politicians. Many are simultaneously prevalent in peer-reviewed research.[121] A summary of these is provided below:

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[120] Blanco et al. (2022).
[121] Many of these are also found in existing empirical and theoretical research, see Oross and Kiss (2023); Macq and Jacquet (2023); Koskimaa et al. (2024); Koskimaa and Rapeli (2020); Fung (2015).

KEY NARRATIVES	NARRATIVE ARGUMENTS / TROPES	DESCRIPTION
Effective Governance Policymakers emphasised the functionalist role of democratic innovations in contributing to effective governance.	Epistemic Plurality	Democratic innovations increase the effectiveness of decisions by involving a diverse range of people in decision-making, leading to more considered and less biased policies.
	Complexity	These innovations allow for more effective decisions on complex or wicked problems by framing issues more effectively, recognising trade-offs, and offering solutions to those most likely to be affected.
	Efficiency	Resource-efficient policies are more likely when decisions are robust, diverse, and avoid the pitfalls of policies that fail to gain public traction or are poorly conceived.
	Legitimacy	Democratic innovations increase the legitimacy of governance decisions both within and between governmental institutions and among the public.
Democratic Resilience Policymakers also recognised the role of democratic innovations in addressing the legitimation crises faced by democratic institutions. These narratives were intertwined with the broader crises of democracy and emphasised the role of democratic innovations in building resilience.	Trust	They respond to the lack of public trust in governmental institutions, political parties, and electoral systems.
	Alienation	They make government institutions and actors more relatable, addressing public alienation from them.
	Populism	They offer a means to counter social and political polarisation and its manifestations in populism.
	Democratic Practice	They provide citizens with positive and impactful experiences of democratic engagement.
	Resilience	They help build a social mandate and commitment to hard policy choices necessary for navigating current and future societal crises.

	Representative Democracy	They supplement and complement, rather than supplant, existing institutions of representative democracy.
	Community Bond	They allow elected representatives to forge closer, more instrumental relationships with their electorate.

Table 4. Narrative tropes used to persuasively argue for the use of democratic innovations across government.

Interviewees also pointed out the **specificity of words** as being crucial to making the case for democratic policymakers. In some contexts, particularly in countries like Hungary and Italy, **terms such as "democratic innovations," "participation," "deliberation," and "citizen engagement" were reportedly met with suspicion or outright hostility**, especially among right-leaning politicians. Therefore, carefully crafting the narrative to be contextually appropriate is essential for effectively promoting democratic innovations.

> *Actually the political thing speaks to why I call it participatory methods rather than deliberative … and definitely sort of steering clear of the word democracy. [Rather we are] very, very deliberately focused on improving policy making and improving policy impact. Because that way it can endure. The minute that we start talking about deliberative or democracy or any words like that, it just triggers … rising far right types that we seem to keep managing to elect.*
>
> *Fully anonymised senior civil servant in national government*

All in all, the effective promotion and embedding of democratic innovations within governmental institutions require a nuanced understanding of the political and institutional context, along with the tactical use of persuasive narratives and precise wording. It is with this specificity in mind that practitioners, advocates and civil society could make a strong case for democratic innovations.

4.4. A robust evidence base for the efficacy and impact of democratic innovations

Successfully embedding participatory practices and democratic innovations within administrations requires a robust evidence base of their efficacy, impact and feasibility. Currently policymakers working on democratic innovations lack this and have identified this as a key vehicle for promoting the use of participatory practices across government. Unsurprisingly,

this need was particularly acute in administrative environments with technocratic decision-making processes and a strong emphasis on evidence-based policy decision-making.[122]

Interviewees were conscious of the limited value of current advocacy strategies. Making the case for citizen engagement throughout government institutions currently relies firstly on well-articulated and tactical narratives (see section 4.3) and secondly, on **exposing politicians and decision-makers to concrete experiences of citizen engagement**. The latter strategy can leave indelible and long-lasting impressions on attending politicians and policymakers, fellow citizens as well as other attendees. This was the design virtue of citizens' assemblies in Ireland, France and the Conference on the Future of Europe to mention a few. The ability of these strategies to sustainably gather champions within government is both limited in scope and as a scalable solution. These strategies need to be complemented by a robust and rounded evidence base for democratic innovations.

Interviewed civil servants in national governments and European Union institutions spoke of the absence, limited scope, and lack of robustness of existing evidence on the effectiveness of democratic innovations whilst also being cognizant of the difficulties of how to create such a broad and robust evidence-base in a rapidly evolving field. This is also reflected in some policy documents. For instance a recommendation from the Scottish Citizen's Panel on Public Participation identified the need to build a solid evidence base for deliberative democracy to determine its effectiveness and to develop a framework for measuring impact.[123]

Interviewees identified the difficulty of drawing up evidence-based approaches to the impact of democratic innovations is intimately tied to the lack of consensus on how to measure their impact. Despite the existence of several evaluation and learning frameworks, **there is little consensus about the multiple and necessary dimensions of impact** (see further section 6 below). Finally, civil servants identified the financial unfeasibility of collecting the requisite evidence of the impacts of democratic innovations – these can sometimes cost 5-10 times more than routine policy evaluations.[124]

Existing evidence on the impact of democratic innovations is limited. For instance, emerging evidence shows the short-term impact of citizens' assemblies on participant perceptions and behaviour. Participants may show increased abilities to engage in reasoned disagreement, higher political trust, greater democratic participation and decreased susceptibility to influence.[125]

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[122] OECD (2020).
[123] Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee (2022) 61.
[124] Rask et al. (2021).
[125] Wappenhans (2024 forthcoming).

> *"Question: So how is impact currently understood?*
> *Civil servant: So I think not well, is the honest answer to that."*
>
> *Senior civil servant, Scottish government*

Evidential clarity was, however, lacking across a range of issues identified by interviewees:

i. The impact of democratic innovations on policy, government decision-making processes and actors within government;

ii. The efficacy and impact on societies of social policies created with participatory methods;

iii. The impacts on citizen perceptions and behaviour beyond citizen participants of democratic innovations on proposed purposes such as democratic resilience, public trust etc.;

iv. The impacts over the long-term both within government and the broader citizenry;

v. How and when different participatory methods can and should be used at different moments of the policy cycle;

vi. How a microcosm of affected society is fairly represented in the selection of citizens and stakeholders for a democratic innovation;

vii. Which policy domains are best suited for different democratic innovations in order to maximise their potential.

Realistic ambitions for democratic innovations may be thwarted without a broader and considerably more robust evidence base for their use and utility. If democratic innovations are to be embedded into administrations, participatory policymakers need to be armed with full knowledge of their concrete virtues. Whilst these gaps remain, research is underway within European Union institutions,[126] some governments[127] and amongst practitioners;[128] all to address this core need.

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[126] Community of Practice of the Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy, 'Understanding the Impact of Citizen Engagement on Policy, Institutions & Society' May 2024, see <https://cop-demos.jrc.ec.europa.eu/blog/understanding-impact-citizen-engagement-policy-institutions-society> (accessed 25 February 2025).
[127] Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee (2022).
[128] Demski and Capstick (2022).

4.5. Participation laws define, guide and enforce the use of democratic innovations, but they do not promote cultural change by themselves

Law is one of the strongest tools at the disposal of government institutions. How this lever is used in the field of democratic innovations and participatory governance remains an open question. The senior civil servants interviewed for this report showed two distinct sets of attitudes and beliefs.

First, interviewees showed a **deeply ambivalent attitude towards the use of law to better embed democratic innovations and create the conditions for a culture change within administrations**. On the one side of this ambivalence lies the belief that participation laws can institutionalise democratic innovations and failing this, create a permissive environment for their use within administrations. Intimately tied to this argument is the belief that participation laws can safeguard participatory practices of governance from the winds of political change.[129] Or put otherwise, law's normative weight can compensate for a lack of political will. On the other side of this ambivalence, civil servants are wary of participation laws stultifying participatory governance and innovation cultures. Civil servants expressed the belief that whilst laws or principles can offer guidance, they can standardise participatory procedures and at worst, reduce citizen engagement to a box-ticking and stakeholder exercise.

The second belief expressed by interviewed civil servants was the use of law to embed democratic innovations may be wholly inadequate. Recent research identifies the view of Barcelona's former commissioner for participation: "[c]hanging participation patterns is not just about changing a rule. It has to do with changing a culture of relationships between actors, a political culture in the city."[130] For some, **there is an overemphasis on law being a necessary policy lever for institutionalising, rather than embedding, democratic innovations**.

However, whether participation laws should be used as a key lever is, in part, a moot point. As discussed earlier (section 3.2), in 2019 74% of all participatory budgeting initiatives across Europe were enabled by legislation.[131] **A wide variety of legal norms are already defining, guiding and enforcing the use of participation in administrations**.

Despite this development, there are at **least three blind spots on the uses of legislation according to participatory civil servants**. First, there is little evidence of the effects of legislation on the growth, diffusion and administrative penetration of democratic innovations such as participatory budgeting.[132] Second, there is little research on the type of regulation or regulatory environments that are best suited to democratic innovation or enabling participatory methods. Finally, laws are often reductively seen as either enabling or hindering desired governance changes, considerably underestimating how the complexities of legal norms shape the relationships between actors.

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[129] Pogrebinschi (2021).
[130] Blanco et al. (2022) 13.
[131] Dias et al. (2019).
[132] Allegretti (2021).

Table 13 below shows some of the complexities of how law can be used in a myriad of ways. Participation legal norms arrive from different legal instruments – constitutional laws, primary legislation, secondary legislation, case law and soft-law. It also shows that the nature of these laws can be substantive or procedural. Participation laws can impose obligations or offer rights; they can be permissive or punitive; primary or residual. Enabling an understanding of this complexity may help participatory civil servants navigate norms that already shape their behaviour.

TYPE OF LAW	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Mandatory laws	Legal norms – whether through legislation or cases – may mandate the use of a democratic innovation or participatory practice. These are used in at least 10 nations which bind themselves to the use of participatory budgeting initiatives.	For instance, in 2017, Mongolia passed legislation that required it to organise a deliberative poll before a constitutional amendment could be considered. This obligation was put to use that same April when a constitutional amendment was sought – the government, in doing so, institutionalised the deliberative poll.[133] In Gdansk, despite not being permanent or institutionalized, the government is mandated to comply with any recommendation by the Citizens' Assembly that receives support from 80% or more of assembly members.[134]
Framework laws	These types of legal norms are permissive, not obligatory. They permit and support local governments if they intend to adopt participatory processes. These can have the effect of normalising and stabilising citizen participation and lending legitimacy to participatory practices in political and administrative cultures.	These are seen for instance in regions of Italy, where participatory practices constitute a collective learning enabled by loose pieces of legislation.[135] Such laws are often considered residual. Scotland's Community Empowerment Act provides a framework for people and communities to be involved in public decision-making.

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[133] See: <https://constitutionnet.org/news/mongolias-flawed-experiment-deliberative-polling-constitutional-reform> (accessed 30 August 2024).
[134] Ross and Morán (2023).
[135] Allegretti (2021).

Incentive laws	These types of laws encourage participation by offering positive incentives for elected officials and public administrations. Whilst these can be used for any form of participatory practice or innovation, these are predominant in participatory budgeting. For participatory budgeting, this allows for the funds allocated in participatory budgeting to be supplemented and reinforced.	This type of law can be found in Poland and Sicily for participatory budgeting initiatives.
Standards and Principles	In addition to legislated legal norms, it is common for national and local administrations to have a semi-codified set of principles or standards of practice. Whilst not strictly binding or holding a legal status, these can carry significant normative weight and often shape the cultures of practice. They may emerge from frameworks, minimum standards and other guidelines for the practice of public participation.	These may constitute participatory principles that shape the work of a participation unit, such as in Helsinki.[136] These principles can function as something akin to a lodestar for practitioners. Scotland for instance has created a participation framework (as well as a procurement framework) that aims to guide policymakers on which kinds of participatory methods to use when involving the public.[137] Such frameworks have also been adopted by other national governments. There are also national standards for community engagement which has produced the Scottish Community Development Centre. Their intended effect is to set standards for participatory practices, whilst also promoting cultural changes within administrations; creating routines within the administration to further both education and capacity building and

[136] See <https://www.hel.fi/en/decision-making/get-involved/information-about-participation-in-helsinki> (accessed 30 August 2024)
[137] See <https://webarchive.nrscotland.gov.uk/20240229135832/http://www.gov.scot/publications/participation-framework/> (accessed 30 August 2024)

		slowly accruing long–term planning and strategy for participatory initiatives.

Table 5. Types of enabling legislation and legal norms for participation

4.6. Invest in key organisational capabilities

In addition to legislation as a mechanism of formally binding administration into commitments with new participatory practices, most interviewees pointed towards **established operational units or nodes as a key mechanism to guarantee the adoption of participatory practice and as a way of practically pushing for culture change within the administration**. The most often stated rationales for dedicated personnel were two: first, dedicating personnel and monetary resources for codifying and furthering other activities of culture change (such as the management of practitioner networks) was seen as key for establishing credibility and ensuring protective practices against individual burnout. Two, units and teams can be seen as an efficient way of creating knowledge hubs that document the institutional memory of participatory practices„ especially in national and supranational contexts where the risk of dispersion of knowledge becomes higher.

The specific institutional form and positioning of these units are bound to be context–specific, and successful constellations take multiple forms.

➢ The cities of **Budapest and Helsinki** have adopted a similar model of such **permanent participatory units** – sitting atop certain policy areas of the city.

➢ At national levels, **France has established the Interdepartmental Centre for Citizen Participation**, which attempts to run across different departments.

➢ In a different design, the **Philippines created the Participatory Governance Cluster** at the Cabinet level, in order to prevent inter–departmental jurisdiction wrangling.

Interviewees commonly and broadly identified the need for a set of principles for institutional design, that cut across governmental departments, and policy contexts, and were seen as useful for a meaningful organisational unit: diverse skill–sets within said units, cross-cutting links of participatory teams, an intentional balance between internal and external mandate, and a precise mandate not eating up space from non–governmental actors.

1. **Diverse skill sets within units of participation**. Diversity of skills and perspectives was seen as a key principle in building a well-functioning participation unit within the administration. Here, diversity refers to not only the diversity of various participatory methods but also of disciplinary backgrounds of participation specialists from psychologists, social workers, administration experts etc. Building a team with various capabilities for interpersonal relationship–building within and beyond government was seen as a key success factor.

2. **Cross-cutting links within the administration of participation units**. While the practical formulations of cross-cutting links can be seen as varied, a key principle stated was a broad network and links within administration across thematic silos. This was seen both as a skillset and network issue but also (and perhaps primarily) a problem of organisational positioning.[138] Most importantly, institutional positioning is integrated enough into other layers of government and key functions. In particular, an intentional decision to link to political layers of government and political stewardship was often seen as valuable. A prominent example of this is Cali, Colombia.[139]

3. **Balance between internal and external mandates**. Acting as a locus of energy and knowledge repository within the government was broadly seen as a key function of dedicated participatory units. Units with an explicit mandate to implement governmental participatory efforts were seen as counterproductive to the objective of broader culture change. Such a mandate would not achieve greater acknowledgement of the uses and embedding of democratic innovations. An exclusive focus only on internal capacity building and codification was also seen as a challenge as the risk of getting divorced from the realities of participatory practices was seen as too big, and balancing selected execution of participatory activities beyond government and internal codification and capacity building roles was seen as a key principle.

4. **Mandate and ability to collaborate with non-governmental actors within the participatory space**. A core unit within government was considered integral for the success of administrative culture change, but no change can exclusively rely on an administrative unit. Governmental units can become 'too strong' and become overly insular within a broader ecosystem of actors within its context. Creating space for non-governmental actors to take an active role in designing, developing, disseminating and advocating for the adoption of democratic innovations was seen as a key act of ecosystem building, where overgrown units within government are at risk of eating away space for the diversity of non-governmental actors.

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[138] Whittingdon (2022).
[139] Ross (2022).

5. Transforming societies

Key Insights:

- ❖ Participatory governance and democratic innovations may have adverse consequences; this should prompt policymakers to ask priori questions of propriety, suitability, and democratic function with a detailed grasp of local contexts.

- ❖ Struggles over representation and power continue to acutely define the functions and implementation of innovations across Europe

- ❖ Citizens' assemblies struggle to engage society at large introducing the challenges of both legitimacy and scale.

- ❖ Administrations need to develop a long-term perspective on the possibilities of democratic innovations.

- ❖ Promising practices to better embed democratic innovations in society ought to combine top-down and bottom-up approaches to democratic innovations.

- ❖ Administration ought to enable CSOs and local actors to undertake large-scale and targeted democratic innovations.

- ❖ Local intermediary actors must be properly integrated into the design and implementation of democratic innovations to ensure their sustainability.

- ❖ Mix democratic innovations to ensure individual strengths can be maximised and to centre scale and equity.

If democratic innovations are to deepen democracy, create sustained social change and transform communities, they need to be deeply rooted in these communities. This is a complex, slow and dynamic process. The embedding of democratic innovations into public administrations is only one key element in reaching that embeddedness. In this chapter we argue that **if democratic innovations are to become embedded in societies, it is necessary to fully leverage the different capacities and functions of a diverse ecosystem of democratic actors**.

This chapter first examines four core challenges to embedding democratic innovations in society (section 5.1). These are faced by policymakers and other actors in the field. These observations emerge partly – where identified – from the observations of interviewed civil servants and from existing research. The chapter then identifies four emerging practices that offer promise for embedding different democratic innovations (section 5.2). These were largely obtained from emerging research and for two of the emerging practices, from interviewed civil servants.

5.1. Four challenges to embedding democratic innovations in societies

The four challenges identified by interviewees were shared across different levels of governance. Certain challenges are more acutely felt and difficult to resolve at higher levels of governance. For instance, ensuring democratic innovations are predicated on the deep, localised and contextual needs of society is considerably more difficult for democratic innovations within the European Union (challenge 1). Just as the negotiation of power and representation struggles are considerably more acute within national governments and across EU institutions (challenge 2).

Challenge 1. Lack of knowledge of local ecosystems may both hinder effective participation and be harmful

The ability of the government to deliver effective participation requires policymakers to adopt high standards for inclusion, safeguarding and equality. Yet interviewed civil servants consider it paramount that these democratic innovations are not seen or used exclusively as a set of technocratic solutions or even reducible to abstractly standardised best practices. Instead these best practices of design should be seen as based on specific value-based assumptions and political premises.[140] **The successful implementation of these innovations needs an honest and transparent assessment of the compatibility between these background assumptions and a locality's cultural histories and institutional frameworks**. Ideally, this assessment should occur through iterative learning between the local community, policymakers, existing civic and community actors, funders and service providers. This allows policymakers to identify those democratic innovations or participatory methods that are impactful and ought to be used, for which policy questions they ought to be used, which design aspects of methods need adapting and translating for local contexts, which may be instrumentalised and co-opted and **which forms of inclusive governance may be actively harmful to communities**.

> *"We knew that there were … some issues in which not even facilitation would have led to any change and one of these topics was migration and the integration of people on the move. It would split communities."*
>
> *Former senior civil servant, Messina*

Research has also shown that democratic innovations and participatory governance may have a dark side. Previous collaborative modes of participatory governance, at national and local levels, have been shown to be extractive and harmful to indigenous populations in Canada.[141] In Latin America, research has shown that the proliferation of sites for deliberation has been used to weaken community-led voices. The multiplication of sites for micro-deliberation

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140 Parry (2023).
141 Dhillon (2017).

has divided community responses to the application for environmental licences by mining companies.[142] In the 1980s and 1990s, participatory methods were considered a key component of the World Bank's disastrous structural adjustment programmes on the African continent.[143] This historical concern chimes with a contemporary one: policy advocates in Scotland have raised concerns that participatory budgeting initiatives may be used to legitimate austerity measures,[144] whilst others question the suitability of citizens assemblies in authoritarian contexts.

The persistent possibility of co-option, extraction and harm requires policymakers and other democratic actors to ask a different order of questions about context. It asks policymakers to go beyond reflexive questions of craft and adoption – namely, how a democratic innovation or participatory method may be designed and adapted to local social, political, economic and institutional circumstances.[145] **If we take seriously the lesson that participatory modes of governance can also have negative consequences, policymakers ought to be prompted to ask a priori questions of propriety, suitability, and democratic function in a given context**. Practically, this entails a clear need to engage with communities and marginalised groups in the design of participatory practices to identify risks and ensure the best possible ways that local understanding is included in the design of participatory processes.

Challenge 2. Struggles for representation and grappling with power–shifts between democratic actors

A key argument often made in favour of democratic innovations is their ability to respond to the legitimacy crises of representative institutions within democracies. Yet, representation questions of who can and should represent a dēmos are subject to conflict. Civil society organisations, elected representatives, trade unions, political parties, local assemblies or neighbourhood associations and social movements are often reported to operate on the belief that they, and sometimes they alone, best represent the interests of a given community of citizens.

Behind these contested claims for representation lies a range of anxieties: anxieties of relevance, resources and/or position and power within a democratic ecosystem. Amidst a shrinking public sphere in innumerable nations there is the sense that one is likely to be adversely affected if existing visions and institutional processes for representations are too violently displaced and diffused.[146] Yet all the aforementioned democratic actors, in one way or another, represent part of the dēmos, with diverging and often conflicting interests.

Research and national government interviewees show that elected officials are likely to claim representative primacy, narrating and constructing an image of democratic innovations as solely complementary to and bolstering the resilience of representative institutions. In another instance, CSOs within Europe and Latin America have long argued that citizens' assemblies displace their long–standing efforts and offer an inadequate substitute. Research also shows

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[142] Motta and Mendonça (2022).
[143] World Bank (1996).
[144] Escobar and Katz (2018).
[145] Escobar and Henderson (2024) 2.
[146] UNDP Global Policy Centre for Governance (2024); Susen (2023); Habermas (1989).

that citizens suffer from anxieties about representation. Upon inclusion, citizens' voices are disciplined or restricted to meet institutional expectations of what a certain type of citizen should be.[147]

Civil servants in national and supranational contexts have struggled to negotiate their role amidst skirmishes for representation amongst different stakeholders. They express difficulty in collaborating with intermediary civic actors, sometimes developing an unproductive and superficially agnostic relationship with them. In particular, within technocratic institutions, there has been a **tendency to circumvent these intermediary actors almost entirely when planning and executing democratic innovations** – as has been argued to be the case during the Conference on the Future of Europe and some ongoing innovations within the Commission.[148]

Part of the challenge is that palpable differences of interests between these actors are displaced onto the broad, abstract, question of representation. One possible effect of this displacement may be that constructive conversations around legitimate policy differences are avoided. This, in turn, has adverse consequences on the societal rootedness of democratic innovations.

At the core of this challenge is how civil servants grapple with power shifts. It asks administrations to hold space for, share, take, cede and/or resist power exercises by various different actors. This skillset is particularly acute for those civil servants using democratic innovations to empower citizens and communities. Empowering communities may involve administrations ceding some control over instruments of policy. A recent example of this is Camden's attempts to establish a Community Wealth Fund – embedded with participatory decision-making structures and information for citizens – whilst also genuinely devolved from the council so that it is a structure with longevity.

Power shifts are also an emerging area of contention between national civil servants and those advocating for citizens' juries and legislature by sortition. National government interviewees currently see citizens' assemblies as complementing existing representative institutions.

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[147] In Finland this has been shown for citizen-experts, see Meriluoto (2021).
[148] Oleart (2023).

> *"Ultimately in a representative democracy, governments get to rule and to make decisions as they see fit. And then they live with the consequences at general elections. That's the way democracy works in this country. Citizens' assemblies to us are a way of enriching or enhancing decision-making and the policy development process. They are not an outsourcing of decision-making."*
>
> *"I think [the tensions in representation between politicians and citizens' assemblies] plays out at every point of the policy development process."*
>
> *Anonymous senior civil servant, national government*

This evolution of citizens' assemblies includes two distinct proposals: (a) ad hoc and yet semi-institutionalised oversight juries within the administrative state;[149] and (b) where institutionalised citizens' assemblies would be given direct legislative power and sit alongside, rather than replace, existing representative institutions.[150] Interviewed national civil servants were deeply resistant to and sceptical of these advocated changes. In part, this rested on the **belief that these were utopian, unnecessary and misaligned with the current moment**. For these civil servants, we are in a moment where representative democratic institutions need to be bolstered and made resilient to the rise of far-right concerns. In contrast, advocates for these countervailing democratic innovations argue that the deepening and renewal of European democracies depends on democratic innovations enacting a fundamental shift in power in who and how we decide. This extends far beyond the current predisposition to use these citizens' assemblies in a consultative manner to make better decisions.

Challenge 3. Citizens assemblies struggle to capture the public's imagination and sparking public debate

An existential concern for embedding democratic innovations is the dual question of meaningful depth of participation and its scale. For instance, citizens' assemblies, which have been critiqued for being a 'short-cut' and divorced from the wider public debate and democratic decision-making.[151] This view of democratic innovations as circumventing broader publics introduces a number of legitimacy questions alongside the problem of scale. We identified two distinct approaches among respondents.

First, interviewed civil servants and advocates continue to frame the problem as one of communication. There is, in other words, the **need to better publicly disseminate recommendations, engage journalists and media outlets, or otherwise spark**

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[149] Bagg (2024).
[150] Sintomer (2023).
[151] Lafont (2019).

meta-deliberation amongst other democratic actors (from the press, to civil society, to politicians) through a broad communications strategy. This has met with varied success. Few assemblies capture the public imagination, though there have been occasional successes. For example in 2021 in France, 70% of respondents from the general public knew about the Citizens Convention for the Climate, whilst 62% supported its recommendations.[152] This ability to establish a recurring dialogue and resonance with the broader public may be linked to the Convention's initial proposal to link to a referendum and direct democracy based on the result – which however never took place. On the less successful side, the Conference on the Future of Europe has just under 3,500 followers on X.

A second approach to scale is being advocated through institutionalising citizens' assemblies as part of or distinct from existing institutions of representative democracy.[153] This model has been proposed for both national and regional levels of governance.[154] **These permanent institutions will, it is argued, gain legitimacy and enter the public's imagination over time. Through this form of institutional maturity, advocates argue that the assembly will over time be both complementary to existing institutions and a countervailing force**. In the meantime, the normalisation of the assembly will allow it to take a certain place within the public's imagination.

Challenge 4. Administrations need to develop a long-term vision of the societal possibilities of democratic innovations

> *"We are trying to find ways to create longevity in the work [of citizen engagement]"*
>
> *Civil servant, Camden Town*

Democratic actors, including interviewed civil servants, need to take a long-term view of how democratic innovations shape and result in social change. Communities, civil society, social movements, elected representatives and administrative institutions tend to demand that democratic innovations, once established, produce tangible, responsive and often immediate results. The short-term view is often predicated on visible immediate changes to policy direction, pieces of legislation (whether constitutions or secondary legislation) or institutional design. This builds legitimacy and enthusiasm for these innovations amongst citizens and those in administrations. However, it needs to be complemented by a long-term vision of the effects of democratic innovations on social conditions.

The case of Porto Alegre is instructive. The case is often cited for the scale of its participation, its effectiveness, its redistributive nature and the success of social mobilisation across social movements, local associations and civil society whilst becoming embedded within administrative institutions. **Long-term effects of the participatory budgeting process on**

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[152] See <https://www.odoxa.fr/sondage/mesures-de-convention-citoyenne-seduisent-francais-a-lexception-notable-110-km-h/> (accessed 5 February 2025).
[153] Landemore (2020).
[154] OECD (2021).

social, environmental and ecological outcomes were still documented in 2019 – some 30 years after it began.[155] This research showed that the practice of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre was an effective method to fairly and efficiently distribute limited resources and meet the immediate and basic needs of the most vulnerable residents, without requiring the goodwill policies of an elected government. It also showed that although the distribution of resources focused on immediate needs to improve housing, water and sanitation facilities and urban infrastructures. Yet such was the long-term accrual of these policies that Porto Alegre soon dramatically improved its environmental conditions, becoming in the mid-2000s one of Brazil's greenest cities, sustaining high levels of biodiversity and protected land; achieving close to universal distribution of treated water; whilst its waste management system become one of the best in the world. Despite the weakening of the deliberative system and the narrowing of the budget since 2004, the long-term effect of this democratic innovation was a drastic increase in the levels of environmental justice. Infrastructure built throughout the process has been of better quality and less expensive, whilst citizens have reported a dramatic increase in their wellbeing as a result of these participatory structures of governance.

5.2. Promising practices to better embed democratic innovations in societies

Despite many intractable challenges, promising practices to better embed democratic innovations have been identified along three lines. First, there is the opportunity to better leverage and connect the differently distributed capacities of diverse democratic actors – from CSOs, political parties, social movements, community associations, charities, governmental institutions and their motley alliances. Second, there is room to imaginatively connect diverse methods and forms of democratic innovation, so as to exploit their comparative advantages and limits.[156] Third and finally, there is a need to diversify the participatory functions of democratic innovations beyond an impactful governance relationship with state institutions.

The remainder of this chapter examines four emerging practices that open new democratic avenues.

Combine top-down and bottom-up approaches to democratic innovations as shown by certain social movements

Over time, social movements, CSO and certain political parties have demanded the use of democratic innovations for improved participatory governance.[157] Historical examples include: the infamous case of Porto Alegre; the NGO-driven movement of 'Citizen Parliament' that helped drive some of the ambitions for citizens' assemblies in Ireland; to the *gilet jaunes* protests inciting the French government to institute 10,000 local meetings and a French Citizens' Convention on Climate and the proposed exit referendum; the Indignados and Podemos created new participatory channels that reshaped participatory governance structures in Barcelona; to the waves of New Municipalism that spread across Italy (with, for instance, Cambiamo Messina dal Basso), Spain and Greece; and social movements that resulted

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[155] Friant (2019).
[156] Lerner (2024).
[157] Bua and Bussu (2021); Della Porta and Felicetti (2019).

in the participatory reform of the Icelandic constitution.[158] In each of these examples, the strategies and tactics of intermediary democratic actors have differed, with the consequences of bottom-up mobilisation being extremely varied.

For some social movements and civil society organisations, the aim is to pressure the government to introduce administration-led democratic innovations complemented by direct democracy – as was the case in Porto Alegre, France and Ireland. The second strategy is for social movements and civil society actors to attempt to take up elected positions in order to transform participatory governance within existing bureaucratic institutions – as was the case of Barcelona, Messina and other cases inspired by New Municipalism.[159] Unexpected and enduring alliances have been built between social movement participants and civil servants, transnational networks of civil servants from 'Fearless Cities' have formed, and new participatory structures within and beyond administrations have emerged as a result (e.g. Decidem).

Following the research of Bua and Bussu, and the observations of some interviewed senior civil servants, this report argues that **bottom-up mobilisations and top-down processes for democratic innovation need to be seen in a dynamic relationship**. Researchers have termed the former as "democracy-driven governance" and the latter as "governance-driven democracy." Emphasis lies on how these different processes dominate at distinct political moments, but ought to be grasped together. Social movements advocating for and using democratic innovations can incite, complement, challenge and/or be disarmed by top-down processes.

Notably, the r**ole of social movements and political parties can be crucial for the empowered use of democratic innovations in illiberal contexts**. Research in Hungary has shown that democratic innovations have been hollowed out. National consultations, initially instrumentalised by Fidesz to gain power and then institutionalised, have been deprived of their deliberative character since taking power. Whilst local citizens' assemblies had little impact on politics or policymaking.[160] There is also **considerable concern over the use of deliberative innovations in illiberal contexts due to a susceptibility to elite influence and design features that are maladaptive to local contexts**.. Other research has shown, however, that green movements put participatory budgeting on the agenda of Hungarian politics, whilst civil society organisations successfully won seats during municipal elections to promote this innovation within administrations.[161] This alliance between social movements, civil servants, some elected politicians and newly elected municipal representatives may offer a countervailing force. In other cases, it is the support of non-domestic and external actors which ensures the sustainability of these democratic innovations. These **motley alliances can, on occasion, resist the use of dismembered and disempowered democratic innovations, whilst instituting practices in administration that show their potential for democratic renewal.**

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[158] Bua and Bussu (2021); Sintomer (2018); de Sousa Santos (2005); Fung and Wright (2003).
[159] Della Porta and Felicetti (2019).
[160] Szitkay et al. (2024).
[161] Oross and Kiss (2023).

Enable CSOs and local actors to undertake large-scale and targeted democratic innovations

Civil society organisations around the globe are increasingly commissioning and using democratic innovations.[162] In recent years there has been a change in the traditional ways in which these innovations are being used. Traditionally CSOs would aim to persuade public administrations to both commission and implement the recommendations of various participatory processes. Here impact is often directly related to policy uptake.

In recent years certain organisations[163] have sought to mobilise broad citizen participation to influence the directions of public debate and discourses, to influence public discussions during election cycles and to explicitly challenge governmental policy. The goals of these initiatives may vary from opening up spaces and forming communities for collective political action, to exercising a form of countervailing power against government inaction.[164] If policymakers and public administrations seek to ensure a vibrant and deeply plural public sphere, it is precisely such non-instrumental initiatives that need to be enabled through funding and lent expertise.

Example 1: The People's Assembly for Nature – United Kingdom

Organised by three prominent conservation organisations in the United Kingdom. The National Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the World Wide Fund for Nature first ran a national conversation that received over 30,000 public submissions about how to protect people's relationship with nature before running an assembly that sought to influence the advocacy and orientation of businesses, charities, communities, individuals, local governments and civil society organisations.[165] The explicit purpose of this exercise was to build civil society advocacy and campaigning to help reframe how society understands and replies to the crises of nature.

Example 3. The People's Assembly for Nature, United Kingdom

Example 2: German Citizens' Assembly on Climate

Organised by the two independent civic bodies: the BürgerBegehren Klimaschutz and Scientists for the Future. This process, again, eschewed a link to a formal political or administrative process. It was timed to influence pre-election public dialogue and political debates on how Germany was fulfilling its climate obligations under the Paris Agreement and how it could do so with socio-economic and environmental justice considerations in mind. It succeeded in drawing responses from political parties and individual politicians as well as shaping public dialogue during the election. Furthermore, it helped shape the

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[162] In Latin America, see Pogrebinschi (2023).
[163] See also Extinction Rebellion's use in The Humanity Project, see <https://humanityproject.uk> (accessed 25 Feburary 2025).
[164] Dean (2018).
[165] RSPB (2023).

coalition negotiations and the coalition agreement at the end of the federal election.[166]

Example 4. German Citizens' Assembly on Climate

Ensure locally rooted intermediary actors are properly integrated into the design, process and sustainability of democratic innovations

As explored above in challenge 1 above (section 5.1), a recurring criticism of citizens' assemblies is that they are often divorced from existing community spaces of participation, infrastructure and actors. Such spaces and actors may include informal institutions, local associations, civil society actors and community leaders. To ensure that assemblies empower communities and their results are sustainable, these intermediary actors need to be mobilised and engaged with, rather than circumvented.[167] In turn, intermediary actors may be sceptical of such processes. As the examples below show, this set of practices are not limited to citizens' assemblies.

Example 1: Citizen Assemblies run by Decidadanía in Brazil[168]

When three climate assemblies were held across three municipalities focusing on different topics, civil society actors were sceptical. In response, the organising and delivery body created a governance body for these assemblies, which included local non-governmental organisations, social movements, universities, city council members, and mayors. This move towards collaborative decision-making on the process and design elements of the assemblies permitted an inclusive environment. Assembly members in such localised circumstances are often expected to represent a local community and their concerns; this design process ensured this de-politicisation was less likely to occur.

Example 5. Locally rooted citizen assemblies run by Decidadanía in Brazil

Example 2: Informal Settlement Support Programme, Western Cape, South Africa

In Western Cape, South Africa, the government sought to ensure that settlement communities obtained basic services despite large sections being without.[169] There was little uptake of this top-down process, until the government decided to change strategy and undertake a participatory process with settlement communities and intermediary actors. Through the Informal Settlement Support Programme it developed a participatory system with NGOs that were heavily involved with local community engagement. These NGOs have facilitated

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[166] Boswell et al. (2023).
[167] Youngs (2022).
[168] Curato et al. (2024).
[169] Ross and Morán (2023).

community committees in all settlements so that communities can lead themselves and develop autonomous forms of organisation capable of expressing their concerns to the government. NGOs are, in other words, integral to the long-term empowerment of settlement communities.

Example 6. Locally rooted participation in Western Cape, South Africa

Mix democratic innovations whilst centering equity

In order to systemically transform how decisions are taken and in order to foster broader and deeper cultures of community engagement, democratic innovators are advocating for combining democratic innovations and situating them in a wider ecosystem of participation strategies.[170] Others have advocated for a community-driven approach to combining participatory budgeting and citizens' assemblies.[171] Citizens' assemblies are necessarily restricted from mass participation and often unable to make binding decisions; whilst participatory budgeting tends to have existing infrastructure in place, is open to significantly broader participation and can lead to a redistribution of resources, but lacks a solid deliberative component. The desire to combine and connect these democratic innovations is an attempt to tackle problems of scale, equity and impact.

Example: New York City Boroughs

Multiple and diverse avenues for citizen engagement exist across different moments of the policy cycle. The process comprises four phases to ensure depth and breadth of engagement, equitable distributions and discernible impacts.[172] The first phase gathers thousands of proposals from New York's diverse population of 11 years or older, irrespective of immigration status. This helps define the problems and needs of local communities. Phase two involves a demographically representative Borough citizens' assembly deliberating these ideas to decide which proposals might best serve their communities before Phase three is put to the vote on a city-wide ballot. Here, over 110,000 ballots are cast. Those selected will be implemented in phase four by community organisations. In addition, communities and neighbourhoods with a higher percentage of health and socioeconomic disparities are awarded an additional budget to disperse – raising the hopeful spectre of social justice aspirations. This process not only centres on equity and scale but also connects people and participatory processes across localities and geographies. Because it focuses on significant regional and then city-wide networks, it allows participants to grapple with shared and distinct problems and needs while allowing for the co-creation of tailored solutions for local communities.

Example 7. Mixing democratic innovations and centring equity in New York Boroughs

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[170] MacDonald-Nelson and Chwalisz (2024).
[171] Vlahos (2024).
[172] <https://www.sortitionfoundation.org/the_peoples_money> (accessed 30 August 2024).

6. Conclusion and future directions

Democratic innovations have been increasingly utilised across various administrations in Europe, and their slow but steady increase is bringing them closer to the mainstream of policymaking. Multiple active communities are advocating for better participatory processes and mechanisms for transformation change, both within the administration and outside of it; sometimes working together, sometimes apart, they carry the field forward in multiple ways. Some of those ways successfully support the embedding of democratic innovations. At the same time, democratic innovations can be seen as fraught, dependent on the work of a minor (albeit growing) group of individuals, and constantly at risk of being deprioritised: no claims of sustained and successful embeddedness can be credibly made.

This report has aimed to document the variety of trends, current challenges, and emergent practices identified by policymakers and advocates on how they are aiming to further embed democratic innovation – through building power to networks of actors, creating the arguments and evidence for democratic innovation, protecting action through legislative mandate, creating centres of competence, and ensuring all work strengthens a civil society able to capture the transformative potential of new participatory practice.

Significant efforts are needed to continue advancements across Europe utilising the tactics mentioned above of locally tailoring appropriate strategies for embedding. At the same time, the question remains: ***What are the possible underexplored avenues and considerations that would need further work in order to unlock the possibilities of democratic innovations?***

Through the research conducted for this scoping report, we have identified **four open lines of inquiry that remain underexplored within communities of policymakers and practitioners of democratic innovation**. These can be seen as broad issues or questions worthy of further elaboration, and we aim to address them further through the remainder of the Networks for Democracy project.

1. How do democratic innovations interact across various levels of governance?

    An understanding of the need to better understand and be equipped to design democratic innovations across local, regional, national and supranational levels of government in a differentially distributed but mutually supportive manner. However, experimentation and experiences of these multi-governance issues remain sparse and unconnected.

    Engagement existed within the European Commission, where the question of multi-level governance has returned to the fore as both a strategic priority and the boon of Belgium's use of the rotating presidency of the European Council to elevate a local assembly on the development of AI within the EU.

    Inasmuch as multi-level governance relates to democratic innovations, two questions come to the fore. First, which is the appropriate scale for citizen participation and the use of democratic innovations, where, and under what conditions? Second, in a given area of governance, how can and should different levels of governance using

participatory mechanisms connect with each other? These questions gain relevance in policy realms such as climate change governance and polycrisis governance.

2. How can the impact of democratic innovations be appropriately thought of and measured?

An understandable and valuable surge in efforts to appropriately measure the impact of democratic innovations has accompanied the increase in their use as a policy tool. As discussed in Chapter 3.4, there are clear benefits to building a solid evidence-base for democratic innovations and particularly their impacts – impact measurement helps make a persuasive evidence-based case for incorporating new participatory practices into policymaking. It also makes visible successful practices used for iteration, scrutiny and development.

The analysis of impact is multidimensional – spatially, temporally and conceptually.[173] It first entails the effect of democratic innovations and participatory practices on policy – but what constitutes effect on policy? Policymakers stated that identifying the impact on policy is considerably challenging. Not only are policy processes non-linear, sometimes verbal and often involve a great number of actors. How substantively does the participatory process change the actual policy output, or how are changes in power relations between citizens and administrators measured? The second element entails an understanding of the impact on policy actors and institutions of government. Democratic innovations are often accompanied by strong personal and affective experiences; whilst participatory policymakers are also affected in the long term. Third, the analysis of impact often considers the impact on public discourse – to what extent there was a recursive relationship between democratic innovation and the broader public and its various constituencies. Finally, there is the potential impact on participants of the democratic innovations – whether assembly members or those who engaged in participatory budgeting. This spatial understanding of impact ought to be complemented by an understanding of how impact in these spaces across different time horizons.

3. How can regulation and legislation be tactically utilised to support democratic innovations?

Legislation is one of the strongest tools within the reach of policymakers to ensure legitimacy, resources, and mandate for new practices – hence, it is no surprise many policymakers see it as a critical avenue for embedding democratic innovation. Having said this there is also a clear cautiousness among policymakers to codify new democratic practices into legislation (described also above in 3.5) without thoroughly assessing how well the legislation allows for shifts and improvements in the actual practices related to democratic innovations, with a clear risk in codifying into law forms of democratic innovation that 'take the innovation out of democratic innovation'.

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[173] Demski and Capstick (2022); OECD (2021).

This is particularly true in relation to legislating for citizen assemblies – examples of legislative practice supporting participatory budgeting is far more prevalent. Here, the question persists: what are the most appropriate legislative practices that support citizen assemblies without eating their transformative potential?

4. How, if at all, can democratic innovations be useful in illiberal contexts?

Participatory practices have been adopted widely across the globe. Yet, the current debates on institutional adoption, mainstreaming, or embedding of democratic innovations have a geographical and intellectual bias: the premise of democratic innovation is, to a large extent, that they can complement liberal democratic institutions and administrations. With an increasing number of countries, both globally and in Europe, characterised as illiberal democracies or democracies in various levels of decline, the significant remaining question revolves around the limits and opportunities of democratic innovations in illiberal contexts.

On the one hand, new forms of participatory decision-making can be seen as a potent counter-force and create much-needed spaces for democratic deliberation in illiberal contexts. Yet there is little evidence of this.[174] Conversely, it is clear that democratic innovations can be co-opted by anti-democratic institutions and used as a smokescreen for accruing political power. How should participatory practices be applied and designed in illiberal contexts? Which actors should be engaged with? What alliances will allow for these innovations to penetrate illiberal societies? Is it possible to plan for safeguards against co-optation? Thoroughly answering such questions requires more work on practices of embedding democratic innovations in diverse national contexts.

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[174] Woo and Kübler (2020).

Appendix 1: List of Table and Figures

Appendix 2: Research Design

The research for this report combines several different methods. Its methodological design permits an iterative and agile approach to discerning leading civil servants' attitudes, needs and practices. It is structured as a scoping report rather than a systemic review of the literature or policymaker perspectives.[175]

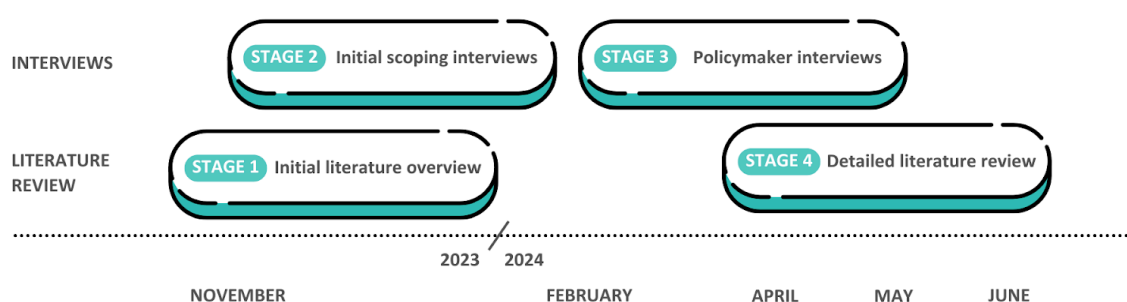The preparation of this report was completed in four stages:

Figure 7. Timeline of Research conducted. Source: authors' own.

Stage 1—initial literature review. The first of two literature reviews was conducted in the Fall of 2023. The aim was to identify key academic and grey literature on the use of democratic innovations in comparative European contexts and beyond local levels of governance. This review offered blind spots, priority policy areas, key case studies, and emergent patterns in the field.

Stage 2 – initial scoping interviews. Between November 2023 – February 2024, we conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with 16 practitioners, advocates and academics, including multiple members of the Nets4Dem consortium. These interviews were structured around three considerations. First, how these actors conceived of the needs of policymakers and their own needs within the broad field of democratic innovations. Second, what policy work could contribute to helping build networks within the field? Third, to identify the key leverage points and future directions of the field. One of the key findings of these scoping interviews was the need to grasp better and imagine how to embed democratic innovations in genuinely diverse European contexts.

Stage 3—policymaker interviews. The primary interviews were conducted between February and May 2024. Here, we conducted 17 detailed

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[175] Scoping reports are not systemic reviews. They do not assess the quality of other reviews, but do aim at a comprehensive approach towards relevant literature, see Levac et al. (2010).

semi–structured interviews, of which 15 were with policymakers and 2 with non–governmental experts.

Policymakers were chosen with three broad criteria in mind: (a) instructive cases of both failed or emergent attempts to embed democratic innovations that emerged from the literature and existing databases; (b) access: some policymaker access was only gained through a snow–ball effect of the interviews themselves and access to other policymakers came too late (e.g. at national and local levels in France, Spain, Athens Barcelona and Paris); (c) diversity: a diverse set of policymakers were sought along the following differential axes of their stances, proximity to decision–making power for participatory governance processes, different and diversity of levels of governance and the specific administrative structure and culture of the state.[176]

Policymakers at local or city levels of governance included those from Budapest, Camden, Helsinki and Messina. Those at national or regional levels included those from Finland, Ireland, Scotland and the United Kingdom. Those at the supranational level included policymakers from various European Commission Directorate–Generals and the World Bank. (see figure 1 above)

Stage 4—detailed literature review. The second phase of the scoping literature review was systemic and detailed. It was conducted between April and June 2024. The focus areas were heavily influenced by primary observations and syntheses that emerged from expert interviews.

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[176] On the structures and competencies of the state and regions, as well as the nature of the administrative state, the following reports were instructive: European Commission (2018); European Commission (2017) 12–21; Council of European Municipalities and Regions (2016).

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