

Democracy for Transition (D4T) Coalition

Democracy for a World on Fire

Democratising the climate transition

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Democratising the climate transition

Executive Summary

Democratising the green transition is critical for its success, as an effective and legitimate transition requires broad public participation and active engagement. To achieve a truly *just* transition—one that addresses both environmental sustainability and social equity—democratic processes must be open, long-term and integrated into decision-making at every level. This requires not just an increase in the number of democratic initiatives underway, but their deep integration into governing structures, and support for civil servants, politicians and public to make best use of them.

This paper sets out how we can democratise the climate transition, highlighting the need for inclusive decision-making, accountability, and public involvement. It then delves into the deep connection between justice and democracy, arguing that a just transition cannot be realised without a foundation of democratic principles.

Finally, drawing on insights from the work of Democratic Society in various projects, particularly NetZeroCities,¹ the paper examines the challenges in democratising the transition and proposes future directions for the Democracy for Transition Coalition that will enable it to enhance democratic practices to overcome these obstacles. To support this, the paper concludes with the following recommendations to enhance democratic practices and ensure a more effective green transition.

- European lawmakers should ensure that Green Deal and other European legislation that impacts the climate transition are both made with good citizen participation and establish clear procedures for bringing citizen voice into their implementation or transposition. This means, in detail:
 - Ensuring the effective use of European Citizen Panels, ensuring that their recommendations are properly acknowledged and used, and that their deliberations and outcomes are publicised.

¹ The platform for the EU Cities Mission: <https://netzerocities.eu>

- Building new participation approaches at European level that draw on this learning, and experiment with complementary approaches that can involve more citizens at lower cost;
- Further develop the European Have Your Say portal, to improve its ease of use particularly under the pressure of high levels of participation.
- Work with climate and democracy expert organisations to ensure that where citizen participation is mandated in a directive or regulation, it is rigorously described, with high standards, to avoid token efforts by member states during implementation.
- In support of this, the Coalition should prepare template text and guidelines drawing on best practice that can be provided to lawmakers in the drafting stage to support effective participation at every level.
- Horizon and other European actions supporting democracy should align behind climate participation as an essential driver of citizen participation, but also a unique challenge. Existing initiatives that involve significant citizen participation practice such as Networks for Democracy and NetZeroCities should be built on and extended, to reduce the siloisation of action and create a European democratic infrastructure that can be accessed at local, national and European level.
- National and local public authorities should be given the tools, training, and resources necessary to implement participation effectively, address representation deficits, and build public trust. This means measures including:
 - developing training programs on identifying marginalised and vulnerable groups, and taking their needs into account when designing, commissioning and delivering citizen participation actions;
 - implementing inclusive participatory practices, and ensuring that biased or exclusionary practice is identified and challenged;
 - creating and requiring the use of practical toolkits with best practices and frameworks, to support smaller public authorities to undertake effective participation;
 - building in-house expertise in citizen participation of all types, both design and delivery, them, to ensure effective integration of

participation and to reduce the reliance on small-scale, non-profit organisations, which often struggle with resource constraints and limited capacity.

- Use good evaluation tools, and open assessment protocols, that identify specific challenges and democratic deficits, allowing for more precise solutions, and which increase public trust in participation processes.
- Embed transparency, inclusivity, and accountability into financial decision-making processes around climate action to ensure that the resources required in the transition are allocated fairly and effectively.
- Democratic practitioners and democratic sector organisations should build stronger networks in places and around issues, and work closely with local, regional and national government bodies to implement effective and trustworthy participation. This should include measures such as:
 - Participation in knowledge and learning networks drawing on the successful experience of expertise networks such as KNOCA (Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies);
 - Work to reduce duplication of effort and consolidate the work of the sector through networks, mergers or collaborations, building on existing networks and actions such as Democracy R&D and Networks for Democracy
 - Create robust and effective measures for assessing and peer-reviewing work, which can be undertaken as part of assessment and trust-building protocols.

01 | A Democratic and Just Transition

Societies worldwide are grappling with two pressing issues: the degradation of the environment leading to a climate crisis, and democratic deficits fueled by systemic and increasing inequalities.² These two issues are interconnected. As dissatisfaction with the political system grows, trust erodes, making it increasingly difficult to implement effective policies for the green transition. Moreover, the deepening climate crisis will only fuel greater dissatisfaction, further undermining trust and deepening democratic deficits, which in turn makes addressing these challenges even more difficult.

Democracies are therefore struggling with the needed transition. Explanations for these struggles include democratic myopia – “the tendency towards short term thinking in democratic decision-making”,³ the power and influence of vested interests,⁴ and the problem that citizens’ views and values are not being considered in decision-making⁵ to mention only a few. As such, there have been calls by some authors to “[put] democracies on hold for a while”⁶ and for more technocratic and authoritarian alternatives.⁷ These calls are unsatisfactory because – the moral arguments for democracy aside – research shows that “democracy is critical to combating climate change”.⁸ Democratic practices at all levels of governance have significant potential to accelerate the green transition. By fostering collaboration between diverse societal actors—citizens, civil society, businesses, and public

² Battilana, Julie, Julie Yen, Isabelle Ferreras, and Lakshmi Ramarajan. 2022. ‘Democratizing Work: Redistributing Power in Organizations for a Democratic and Sustainable Future’. *Organization Theory* 3(1): 1–21. doi:10.1177/26317877221084714.

³ MacKenzie, Michael K. 2021. *Future Publics: Democracy, Deliberation, and Future-Regarding Collective Action*. New York: Oxford University Press; Smith, Graham. 2021. *Can Democracy Safeguard the Future?* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

⁴ Moe, Espen. 2015. *Renewable Energy Transformation or Fossil Fuel Backlash*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK; Oreskes, Naomi, and Erik M. Conway. 2022. *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Climate Change*. Paperback edition, Nachdruck. New York: Bloomsbury.

⁵ Smith, Graham. 2009. *Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁶ Hickman, Leo. 2010. ‘James Lovelock: Humans Are Too Stupid to Prevent Climate Change’. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2010/mar/29/james-lovelock-climate-change> (August 8, 2019).

⁷ Li, Yifei, and Judith Shapiro. 2020. *China Goes Green: Coercive Environmentalism for a Troubled Planet*. Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity.

⁸ V-Dem. 2021. *The Case for Democracy: Do Democracies Perform Better Combatting Climate Change?* V-Dem. https://www.v-dem.net/media/publications/C4D_PB_31.pdf.

institutions—democracy can drive the systemic changes necessary to avert irreversible environmental damage.⁹

In addition, it is important to keep in mind that democracy, as a principle of government, is still widely supported.¹⁰ In this sense, this principle is not experiencing any crisis, as some authors state.¹¹ However, our current practices and institutions are struggling, as while people support the principle, they are disappointed with the practice.¹² It seems to be evident that there is “a widening gap between democratic ideals of increasing numbers of citizens, and the performance of electoral democracy”,¹³ eroding democracy’s legitimacy. These democratic deficits demand urgent attention, requiring a need to build up democratic practices and institutions to tackle the transformative changes we face. Current democratic systems, while valuable, may not suffice for the scale of transformation needed. Thus, a dual transformation is necessary: advancing sustainability while deepening democracy. This involves expanding democratic practices, challenging the power of vested interests, and addressing systemic inequalities that hinder both democratic governance and sustainable progress. There is a need for a democratic transformation.¹⁴

The importance of democratising these transitions is therefore evident. Without the legitimacy that comes from trusted democratic participation, the challenging decisions behind such transitions are more likely to fail. To ensure success in a transition, questions about justice, representation, participation, and deliberation are crucial to making effective and acceptable changes possible and legitimate.

⁹ Pickering, Jonathan, Thomas Hickmann, Karin Bäckstrand, Agni Kalfagianni, Michael Bloomfield, Ayşem Mert, Hedda Ransan-Cooper, and Alex Y. Lo. 2022. ‘Democratising Sustainability Transformations: Assessing the Transformative Potential of Democratic Practices in Environmental Governance’. *Earth System Governance* 11: 100131. doi:10.1016/j.esg.2021.100131.

¹⁰ Pew Research Center. 2017. *Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy*. Pew Research Center.

¹¹ Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2019. *How Democracies Die: The International Bestseller: What History Reveals about Our Future*. Harlow, England: Penguin Books; Mounk, Yascha. 2018. *The People vs Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹² Pew Research Center. 2021. *Many in U.S., Western Europe Say Their Political System Needs Major Reform*. Pew Research Center.

¹³ Warren, Mark E. 2022. ‘Electoral Democracies and Democratic Innovations’. In *Contested Representation: Challenges, Shortcomings and Reforms*, SSRC Anxieties of Democracy, eds. Armin Schäfer, Claudia Landwehr, and Thomas Saalfeld. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 282.

¹⁴ Geissel, Brigitte. 2022. *The Future of Self-Governing, Thriving Democracies: Democratic Innovations By, With and For the People*. 1st ed. London: Routledge; Smith, Graham. 2021. *Can Democracy Safeguard the Future?* Cambridge, UK: Policy Press; Warren, Mark E. 2022. ‘Electoral Democracies and Democratic Innovations’

In this context, democratising the green transition cannot come through single events such as climate assemblies, nor from mere preservation of status quo democratic institutions—it's about reimagining and strengthening them to address the dual crises of climate and democratic deficits. A successful green transition cannot be achieved without widespread citizen participation. Decisions made without democratic legitimacy are prone to failure. Participatory mechanisms that allow citizens to actively shape policies are essential for fostering trust and ensuring equitable outcomes. As such, the pursuit of a just and sustainable future must go hand in hand with deepening democratic practices, where inclusivity, accountability, and transparency drive transformative change.

From this, it becomes evident that questions of justice cannot be separated from democratic processes. As Dowding, Goodin, and Pateman¹⁵ write, many theories of justice overlook the institutional frameworks necessary to achieve their vision and often fail to make explicit connections to democracy. Most implicitly assume democracy as the preferred political system but rarely provide a thorough justification.

The challenge in linking justice with democracy lies in a paradox, as Iris Young¹⁶ highlights: for democracy to promote justice, it must itself be just. In societies marked by deep structural inequalities—unequal distributions of wealth, power, and access to knowledge—democratic processes often perpetuate these injustices. The privileged can leverage their advantages to shape political debates, silence marginalised voices, and entrench the status quo. As a result, democratic systems can end up safeguarding the interests of the powerful rather than fostering justice.

This reality leads some to question whether democratic means are sufficient for achieving justice. While authoritarian or epistocratic alternatives may seem appealing, these approaches pose significant risks, including the potential to entrench injustice through undemocratic means. Moreover, history demonstrates that democratic organising and political mobilisation—despite operating within flawed

¹⁵ Dowding, Keith, Robert E. Goodin, and Carole Pateman. 2004. 'Introduction: Between Justice and Democracy'. In *Justice and Democracy: Essays for Brian Barry*, eds. Carole Pateman, Keith Dowding, and Robert E. Goodin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1–24.

¹⁶ Young, Iris Marion. 2002. *Inclusion and Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

systems—can effectively advance social change. Marginalised groups have long used democratic avenues to challenge injustice and push for greater fairness.

The solution lies in deepening democracy itself. As Frank Cunningham¹⁷ suggests, addressing social harms requires a “democratic fix”—one that makes democratic processes more inclusive, participatory, and accountable. Thus, democratisation is essential to the pursuit of justice. Expanding opportunities for public deliberation helps expose and counter the disproportionate influence of wealth and power, leading to more just political outcomes. By reforming and strengthening democratic processes, societies can address injustice from within.

As Iris Young writes, suggesting that democratisation should wait until the world is just does not only postpone such efforts “into an indefinite utopian future,” but also makes realising a just world equally unlikely. In other words, there cannot be a just transition without deepening democracy, and no deepening of democracy without a just transition. These are interconnected and should be worked on in tandem, as one cannot succeed without the other. Consequently, democratising the transition means both to make it more democratic and to make it more just.

Deepening democracy is therefore central to being both the most effective and durable way to achieve the transition, as well as the key to ensuring a just transition. Looking at ways to further democratise the transition should therefore be central.

02 | Challenges and Future Focus in Democratising the Transition

The work undertaken within the NetZeroCities platform has highlighted the critical importance of democratising the transition to a sustainable future. As cities work towards ambitious climate goals, it has become clear that without deep-rooted democratic engagement, these transitions risk overlooking equity and legitimacy. However, cities attempting to make that engagement real have discovered that there are significant challenges that must be addressed for effective democratisation to take shape. These challenges include gaps in representation, the risk of participation

¹⁷ Cunningham, Frank. 1994. *The Real World of Democracy Revisited, and Other Essays on Democracy and Socialism*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press.

being framed solely through behaviour change, a lack of systemic approach to participation, legitimacy gaps in multi-level governance, and issues of financing the transition. While the support of the NetZeroCities platform helps to meet such challenges, they are significant - and experienced at every level of governance. Indeed, at higher governance levels the challenges can be even more daunting, with additional factors such as rural/urban divides, linguistic and regional differences, and scale and visibility posing additional problems. The practical experience of Democratic Society at every governance level demonstrates these challenges require focused attention, but if successfully addressed, can offer opportunities to build a just and inclusive green transition.

2.1 | Deficits of Representation

One of the most pressing challenges in achieving a just and inclusive transition lies in addressing the deficits of representation—particularly for marginalised and vulnerable populations, which often are the most affected by the green transition.

The green transition will affect various communities in unequal ways, with marginalised groups, low-income populations, and the vulnerable often bearing the brunt of the costs.¹⁸ These groups are frequently excluded from formal political processes, which means their voices, concerns, and lived experiences are not adequately reflected in policy decisions. Traditional models of representation struggle to capture the diversity of interests and perspectives necessary for an equitable transition. This disconnect not only leads to unresponsive policies but also creates a legitimacy crisis, as communities feel sidelined and disempowered.

Through work with NetZeroCities, it has been found that many mission cities express a genuine desire to include marginalised and vulnerable populations. However, this aspiration is often not translated into concrete plans. Cities frequently lack the necessary resources, competence, or tools to effectively address these representation gaps. Furthermore, the issue of representation extends beyond national or local boundaries—decisions made within one political jurisdiction can

¹⁸ Suboticki, Ivana, Sara Heidenreich, Marianne Ryghaug, and Tomas Moe Skjølsvold. 2023. "Fostering Justice through Engagement: A Literature Review of Public Engagement in Energy Transitions." *Energy Research & Social Science* 99: 1–11.

have far-reaching impacts on people in another, complicating efforts to identify and include the most-affected groups.

Addressing these deficits requires broadening political representation. This includes creating new mechanisms that ensure that marginalised and vulnerable groups have a direct say in the decision-making processes that shape their lives. Democratic innovations, such as participatory budgeting and deliberative mini-publics, can provide such a platform for those who are often left out of the traditional political arena. As Smith¹⁹ argues, citizen participation has the potential to challenge social and climate injustices by addressing the core questions of who gets to be in the room and who defines the agenda. By involving citizens, particularly those politically disenfranchised or vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, it is possible to confront policies and practices that favour vested interests profiting from the status quo, thereby redressing existing power imbalances.

This requires asking critical questions: how can democratic processes be designed to ensure the views and interests of those most affected are included? What tools and methods can be employed to identify these groups and involve them meaningfully in the transition? These are questions frequently encountered in the work. Providing public authorities and civil society with effective frameworks, best practices, and capacity-building resources is essential to bridging this gap.

2.2 | Meaningful and Systemic Citizens Participation

The advocacy for democratising the transition stems from the recognition of significant democratic deficits that could jeopardise its success. Without legitimacy in decision-making, the transition is at risk of failing. Democratic innovations are interesting in this context since they have been specifically designed to address the problems of legitimacy by increasing and deepening citizens' participation in decision-making.²⁰ Consequently, one major source of further democratising the transition, is to deepen and increase citizens participation.

¹⁹ Smith, Graham. 2024. University of Westminster Press *We Need To Talk About Climate*. University of Westminster Press; 14

²⁰ Escobar, Oliver, and Stephen Elstub. 2019. "Defining and Typologising Democratic Innovations." In *Handbook of Democratic Innovation and Governance*, Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 11–31.

However, in practice a lot of the approaches to participation fall short. Firstly, citizens' engagement is often reduced to a tool for encouraging behaviour change rather than respecting and building upon their perspectives, expertise, and agency. Secondly, there is a lack of systemic approaches to participation.

2.2.1 | Behaviour Change

One of the biggest challenges is the way participation of citizens is actually framed. Time and time again, participation is framed as a means to achieve behaviour change. While behaviour change is undeniably a crucial component of achieving a green transition, framing public participation solely as a tool to drive this change is fundamentally problematic.

When participation is reduced to means of steering citizens toward predetermined outcomes, it strips individuals of agency and turns them into passive actors in a top-down process. This approach assumes the solutions are already known, leaving little room for public debate, innovation, or critique. Moreover, it undermines the democratic ideal that citizens should have a voice not only in how they live their lives but also in shaping the larger systems that affect them.

To create meaningful participation, there is a need to move beyond the narrow lens of behaviour change. This means engaging citizens from the outset, not simply to encourage compliance with pre-decided policies, but to allow them to define the goals, strategies, and outcomes of the transition.

This framing, based on experience, comes from a misunderstanding of what citizens' participation can and should do. To change this framing, significant effort must be invested in building capacity across policymaking and public administration. This includes not only incentivising citizens to participate but also equipping institutions with the tools and understanding to implement meaningful participatory processes. Training civil servants and other personnel in citizen engagement can foster a culture of open governance, where participation is not merely about compliance but co-creating strategies and outcomes.

2.2.2 | A Systemic View of Participation

One major issue is that citizens' participation in the transition is often fragmented, driven by an overreliance on specific methods or tools that treat engagement as a series of isolated events rather than part of a cohesive, ongoing process. This method-driven approach limits participation to discrete moments without recognising the need for sustained and integrated citizen involvement, often resulting in a disjointed process where participation fails to influence broader decision-making.

To address this, there is a need for a shift toward a systemic view of participation—one that is embedded throughout all stages of governance and across multiple levels of decision-making. Participation must be seen as a continuous, evolving process that is integrated into the fabric of the transition. This involves creating institutional frameworks that ensure public engagement is not an afterthought but a core component of every step, from policy design to implementation and evaluation.

A critical aspect of this systemic view is the need for transparent and accountable follow-up mechanisms. Too often, public input is gathered without any clear path for how it will be used, leading to frustration and a lack of trust. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that citizens are informed about how their input is being utilised, what decisions have been made, and how those decisions reflect the broader participatory effort. Creating feedback loops—where the results of participatory processes are communicated back to the public—can help build trust, foster continued engagement, and ensure that participation is not just symbolic but impactful.

This systemic view would also lead to a more nuanced and varied approach to citizen participation. Democratic innovations are plentiful, but too often, one approach dominates at the expense of others. Previously, Participatory Budgeting held this position; and now Citizens' Assemblies are taking the lead. While these innovations are valuable, it is essential to adopt what Simone Chambers calls a "toolbox approach" to democratic institutions and practices, or a problem-based approach.²¹ Each innovation comes with its own strengths and weaknesses, addressing different

²¹ Warren, Mark E. 2017. 'A Problem-Based Approach to Democratic Theory'. *American Political Science Review* 111(1). doi:10.1017/s0003055416000605.

democratic deficits and challenges. As such, a diverse set of democratic tools must be available, tailored to the specific context and problem at hand.

For example, there are instances where deep deliberation among citizens on a complex issue is crucial. At other times, the primary challenge may simply be addressing information deficits, and making public education or awareness campaigns sufficient. Arnstein's famous "ladder of participation," published in 1969,²² advanced the normative idea that participation should always aim to climb higher toward full citizen empowerment. However, a systemic perspective on participation—and democracy more broadly—would challenge this view. Not all contexts demand maximum empowerment; in some cases, for example, "a consultative role is more appropriate for members of the public than full citizen control."²³

To effectively leverage the democratic toolbox, it is necessary to move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches and adopt a more contextual and adaptive strategy. As Smith²⁴ highlights, one of the key challenges is understanding how to institutionalise participatory democratic institutions effectively and connect them with centres of power within the broader democratic system. Addressing this requires evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the current system and identifying the appropriate "democratic fix" for the issues at hand. Consequently, developing robust frameworks for evaluation and building knowledge about which democratic innovations best address specific deficits is essential.

2.3 | Legitimacy Deficits in Multi-Level Governance

Addressing the climate crisis requires profound changes in the way societies are organised, as well as action and coordination across all levels of governance. Multi-level governance (MLG) systems—spanning local, regional, national, and international levels—are essential for ensuring that actions are taken at the most

²² Arnstein, Sherry R. 1969. 'A Ladder Of Citizen Participation'. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35(4): 216–24. doi:10.1080/01944366908977225.

²³ Fung, Archon. 2006. 'Varieties of Participation in Complex Governance'. *Public Administration Review* 66(s1): 66–75. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00667.x.

²⁴ Smith, G. 2019. 'Reflections on the Theory and Practice of Democratic Innovations'. In eds. S. Elstub and O. Escobar. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 572–81.

appropriate level and complement one another effectively. This coordination is not only critical for optimising climate action outcomes but also for addressing systemic challenges, such as staff shortages and resource constraints, that hinder the transition.

However, while MLG holds the potential to enhance complementarity and coherence in climate action, it also presents significant challenges that can weaken democratic legitimacy. One prominent issue is the depoliticisation of key public matters, where contentious issues are removed from public debate and resolved through elite, expert, or stakeholder accommodations, often behind closed doors.²⁵ This withdrawal from democratic deliberation leads to a lack of transparency and accountability, as decisions are increasingly delegated to bureaucracies, independent expert commissions, or courts. Such policy delegation risks further alienating citizens and undermining the legitimacy of the decisions made.²⁶

These challenges are particularly acute in climate governance. Citizens may feel disconnected from decision-making processes when policies that deeply affect their lives are developed without sufficient local input. This disconnect heightens legitimacy deficits, as governance structures appear unresponsive to the concerns of those most affected by the climate transition.

To address these deficits, multi-level governance systems must prioritise transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. It's important to strengthen the connection between local, regional, national, and international policies, ensuring local voices are heard and influence decisions. This approach helps build trust in governance and ensures that the risks and benefits of climate policies are shared fairly, which is key to a just transition.

2.4 | Financing the Transition

A key issue often overlooked when discussing the democratisation of transitions is the role of the economy. While much of the focus tends to be on political

²⁵ Fawcett, Paul, Matthew Flinders, Colin Hay, Matthew Wood, Paul Fawcett, Matthew Flinders, Colin Hay, and Matthew Wood, eds. 2017. *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization, and Governance*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

²⁶ Scharpf, Fritz W. 2009. 'Legitimacy in the Multilevel European Polity'. *European Political Science Review* 1(2): 173–204. doi:10.1017/S1755773909000204.

democracy—such as elections, representative governments, and citizen participation—less attention is given to the economy and its foundational influence on people's lives. As Andrew Cumbers²⁷ aptly points out, how the economy functions, who controls it, and the decisions made about what is produced and who benefits from those decisions are fundamental to everything else in society.

While economic democracy is a vast topic that extends far beyond the scope of this paper, one crucial element requires immediate attention: financing the transition. The transition comes with significant financial demands, and public authorities are struggling with limited resources. They are seeking guidance on how to attract investments to fund their transition. Access to credit, investment, and economic opportunities is essential for marginalised communities to participate in and benefit from the transition. However, the current financial system often exacerbates inequalities, favouring the wealthy and limiting opportunities for the disadvantaged, small businesses, and nonprofit organisations. The financial system disproportionately benefits the wealthy, while constraining access for those who are most in need.²⁸

The investments and the projects that receive funding determine the priorities and outcomes of the transition, yet these decisions are often made without sufficient public input or transparency. Consequently, to ensure a just transition, it is essential not only to secure the necessary funding but also embed democratic principles into the financial decision-making process. This means prioritising investments that benefit marginalised communities, reduce inequality, and promote social justice. Currently, this presents a challenge, as the projects that would have the greatest impact on these issues often do not receive priority under the current system.²⁹ Importantly, it also involves democratising the investment process itself—ensuring that citizens, community organisations, and cooperatives have a meaningful say in how funds are allocated, and which projects are prioritised.

03 | Recommendations and Conclusion

²⁷ Cumbers, Andrew. 2020. *The Case for Economic Democracy*. Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity.

²⁸ Block, Fred. 2019. 'Introduction to the Special Issue'. *Politics & Society* 47(4): 483–89. doi:10.1177/0032329219878544.

²⁹ Lowitt, Sandy. 2021. Finance and the Just Transition. Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies. https://pccommissionflo.imgix.net/uploads/images/1eb85a_26395defa03049628aa3f712fda18bf3.pdf (August 13, 2024).

The challenges outlined in this paper require urgent and sustained action. The Democracy for Transition Coalition aims over the coming years to support action, principally at European and national levels, to address these challenges.

The following recommendations provide a starting point for the Coalition, addressing these issues and moving towards a more inclusive and effective green transition:

- European lawmakers should ensure that Green Deal and other European legislation that impacts the climate transition are both made with good citizen participation and establish clear procedures for bringing citizen voice into their implementation or transposition. This means, in detail:
 - Ensuring the effective use of European Citizen Panels, ensuring that their recommendations are properly acknowledged and used, and that their deliberations and outcomes are publicised.
 - Building new participation approaches at European level that draw on this learning, and experiment with complementary approaches that can involve more citizens at lower cost;
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 - In support of this, the Coalition should prepare template text and guidelines drawing on best practice that can be provided to lawmakers in the drafting stage to support effective participation at every level.
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infrastructure that can be accessed at local, national and European level.

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 - Use good evaluation tools, and open assessment protocols, that identify specific challenges and democratic deficits, allowing for more precise solutions, and which increase public trust in participation processes.
 - Embed transparency, inclusivity, and accountability into financial decision-making processes around climate action to ensure that the resources required in the transition are allocated fairly and effectively.
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- Work to reduce duplication of effort and consolidate the work of the sector through networks, mergers or collaborations, building on existing networks and actions such as Democracy R&D and Networks for Democracy
- Create robust and effective measures for assessing and peer-reviewing work, which can be undertaken as part of assessment and trust-building protocols.

The challenges at hand are considerable, especially considering the current situation. At this time, it is easy to lose hope. With that, it is important to think and reflect on how extraordinary and revolutionary the nature of democracy is. As Erik Olin Wright and Joel Rogers³⁰ wrote:

Democracy means “rule by the people.” This is an extraordinary idea, a truly revolutionary ideal in the history of human affairs. Imagine: power should be vested in the people—not a hierarchy, not a king, not an elite, but the people. In most complex societies for most of human history, this notion would have been viewed as absurd. Government of the people, by the people, and for the people—the ideal is inspiring, revolutionary, emancipatory.

What is needed is not only inspirational ideas about what democracy could and should be but also a purposeful commitment to bringing these ideals to life. It is crucial to recognise that democracy is never finished. As Patricia Hill Collins³¹ wrote, democracy has always been and will continue to be:

continually responding to the challenges of a particular time and place. Democracy is never finished. When we believe that it is, then we have, in fact, killed it.

³⁰ Wright, Erik Olin, and Joel Rogers. 2015. *American Society: How It Really Works*. Second edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company; 405.

³¹ Hill Collins, Patricia. 2010. *Another Kind of Public Education: Race, the Media, Schools, and Democratic Possibilities*. Boston, Mass., Enfield: Beacon ; Publishers Group UK.