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In the last two hundred years, democracy has been reduced to mean voting in free and fair elections. Yet, this is a relatively recent concept. For centuries, elections were considered to be a form of oligarchy, meaning rule by the few, and the true definition of democracy, as people's power, was originally associated with open participation and representation by lot.

The crisis we have today is not a crisis of democracy, but a crisis of elected oligarchy. Our current governance institutions fail to reflect society's diversity, tearing people apart, and concentrating power in the hands of a few. In a context of multiple crises they do not allow us to adequately weigh trade-offs and make difficult decisions, to consider nature, nor future generations. They are anchored in the short-termism of elections and the inward-looking logic of political parties. These perverse incentives are preventing action, exacerbating polarisation, and fuelling distrust.

At the same time, contemporary practices of true democracy, in the form of Citizens' Assemblies, have been gaining momentum and show us that another kind of politics is possible.

This is why DemocracyNext is working to shift political and legislative power to everyday people through new permanent and empowered deliberative institutions where rotating citizen representatives are at the heart of our democracies.

As an international research and action institute, we work to design and establish these new institutions to transform the governance of organisations that influence public life, rooted in three principles:

- Giving people agency and dignity through participation;
- Distributing equal political power through representation by lot (sortition), and
- Channeling collective wisdom—enabling people to find common ground through deliberation.

The goal of DemocracyNext is to see such institutions have real political power, so that they can eventually become the heart of a new democratic system. Non-profit and non-partisan, our work is to develop a more just, joyful, and collaborative democratic future.

SPEAKERS

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CLAUDIA CHWALISZ is the Founder and CEO of DemocracyNext. Prior to that, Claudia served as the Innovative Citizen Participation Lead at the OECD, where she established and analysed around 600 examples of deliberative assemblies around the world, co-authored the *Catching the Deliberative Wave* report, and set standards for implementation and institutionalisation. She was involved in designing the world's first permanent deliberative bodies made up of people drawn by a lottery in Ostbelgien, Paris, and Brussels. Claudia is an Obama Leader Europe 2023.

JAMES MACDONALD-NELSON is the Project Lead for Urban Design and Planning at DemocracyNext. James is a designer with degrees in landscape architecture, urbanism, and global development studies. Having studied and worked in spatial practice for 10 years in Canada and Europe, James has a deep knowledge of how the built environment is transformed and managed—and how often citizens are left out of these processes. At DemocracyNext James coordinates the area of work on urban design and planning in particular but will also be involved in other projects.

Respondents

PELIN TAN is a sociologist and art historian; currently a professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Batman. Senior research fellow of the Center for Arts, Design and Social Research, Boston. For more than two decades, she focuses on urban and territorial conflict, commons, labor conditions, alternative pedagogies, and methodologies. She is the 6th recipient of Keith Haring of Art&Activism, 2019. A Lead author of Urban Society report by ipsp (Cambridge University Press 2018). She contributed to several publications such as *Climates: Architecture and The Planetary Imaginary* (Columbia University, 2017), *Refugee Heritage* (2021), and *Radical Pedagogies* (2022 MIT Press).

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To bring this to life, DemocracyNext is working to reimagine how urban planning processes can adapt and place more power in the hands of citizens. We have established an international task force of globally renowned professionals from various spatial practices and the fields of deliberative democracy to collaborate and use the power of collective intelligence to develop how this can happen. Together we are developing a new model for systemic changes to democratise city planning, which will be followed by a Call for Proposals for municipalities to work with us to adapt, contextualise, and implement it locally.

We are also focused on researching and designing the physical infrastructure for the next democratic paradigm. At the moment, our current parliaments and spaces for government are not designed for deliberation. Deliberative processes, such as Citizens' Assemblies, take place in conference rooms, libraries, universities, and other spaces that are not necessarily designed for deliberation. Through this work, we are exploring how a space designed explicitly for citizen deliberation might look. How would it reflect the principles of equality, mutual respect, and diversity? If we believe in the need for new democratic institutions, they need to have permanent spaces as well. This matters both symbolically and practically.



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STEVE FALTZ was born and is living in Esch-sur-Alzette. Professionally raised as a civil engineer in road construction, he works for the Ministry of Sports, where he acts as an advisor for communities concerning sports infrastructure. Steve is the president of the local (Esch) section of the Socialist Party and was placed as their top candidate in the past local elections in Esch-sur-Alzette in June 2023. His focus in politics is, amongst others, a courageous urban development to make Esch a more sustainable, social, contemporary, and best-practice city. On the recreational front, he is also the president of the Escher Volleyball Club and an urban beekeeper.

JOSÉE HANSEN is a trained journalist, author as well as art and theatre critic. For 25 years, she was an editor for politics and the arts section at the weekly newspaper d'Lëtzebuerger Land. She has written several books on culture in Luxembourg (on rock music: *d'Rockbuch,* 2005; on contemporary art: *Piccolo Mondo,* 2015; on theatre: *Piccolo Teatro,* 2018). She currently works at the Ministry of Culture, where she is head of the Department of Artistic Creation and Promotion.

MICHEL GREVIS is a teacher, trainer, expert for non-formal education in the fields of nature, environment, transition and education for sustainable development. From 2002–2020 he was head of the Center SNJ Hollenfels – Education for Sustainable Development, Service National de la Jeunesse, MENJE Author and mission manager for the sustainability strategy for Esch2022 – European Capital of Culture. In the 2017–2023 legislature, president of the Commission for Urban Development and Buildings in Esch-sur-Alzette

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MARKUS MIESSEN is an architect, researcher, and Professor of Urban Regeneration at the University of Luxembourg, where he holds the chair of the City of Esch.

CÉSAR REYES NAJERA is a postdoctoral researcher in the field of Urban Regeneration at the University of Luxembourg.