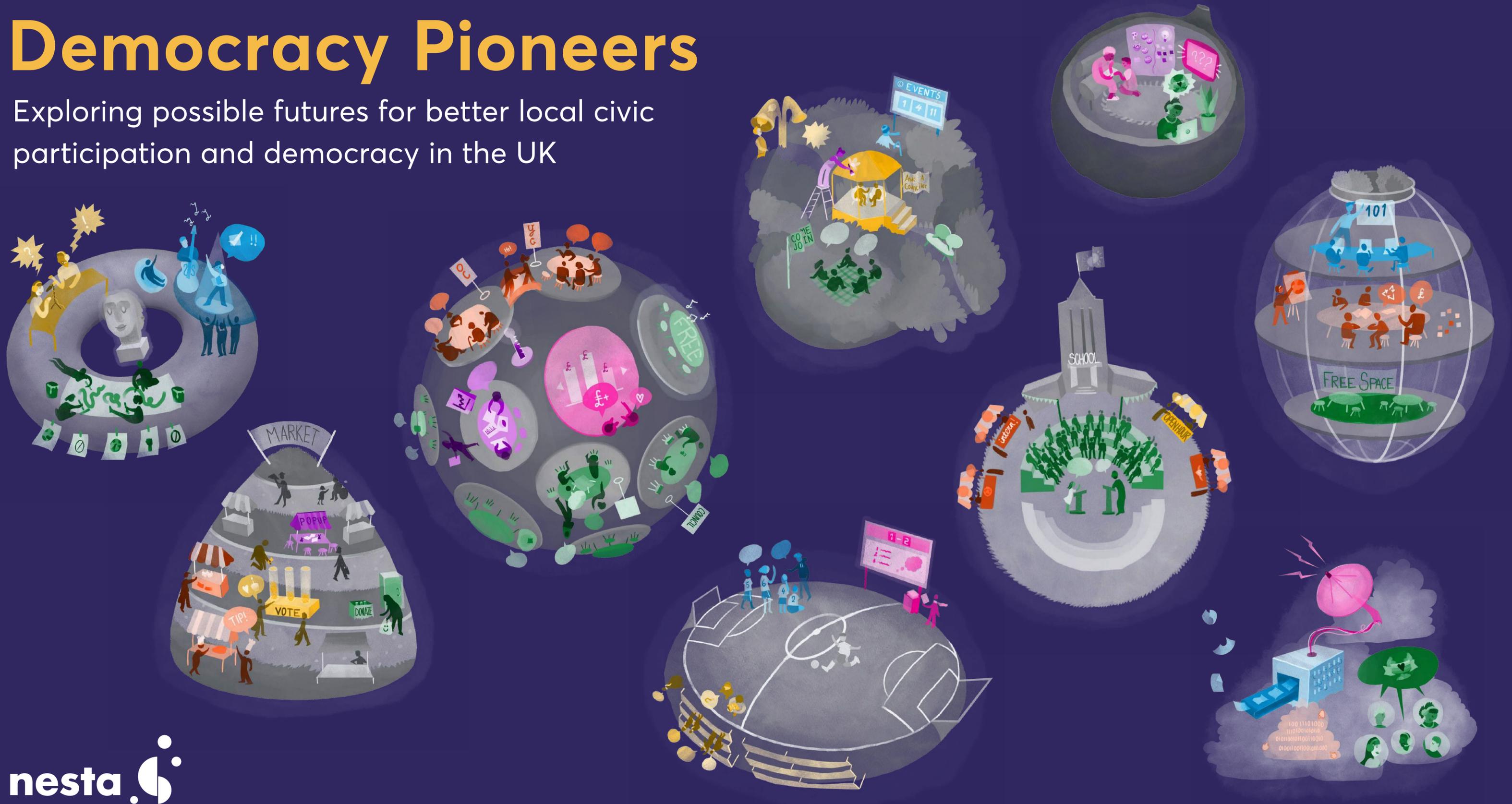


# Democracy Pioneers

Exploring possible futures for better local civic participation and democracy in the UK



# Contents

<a href="#">1. Introduction: Re-energising and reimagining democracy</a>	3	<a href="#">2.2 Inspiring more democratic innovation: Routes to high energy local civic participation and democracy</a>	12	<a href="#">Strong networks: A collaborative democracy sector</a>	41
<a href="#">About this paper</a>	4	<a href="#">People-centred democracy: Reframing democracy around people, not parties</a>	14	<a href="#">3. Re-energising democratic innovation in the UK</a>	46
<a href="#">1.1 The need for democratic innovation</a>	5	<a href="#">Vibrant hubs: Strengthening and mobilising existing communities</a>	19	<a href="#">4. Useful resources and links</a>	50
<a href="#">1.2 Nesta's interest in democratic innovation and the Democracy Pioneers programme</a>	7	<a href="#">Informed society: Building democratic literacy</a>	24	<a href="#">4.1 Useful resources to explore futures approaches to support democratic innovation</a>	51
<a href="#">2. Exploring possible futures for local civic participation and everyday democracy</a>	9	<a href="#">Digital boost: Digital tools that enhance democratic infrastructure and drive new change</a>	29	<a href="#">4.2 Useful resources on democracy and democratic innovation</a>	52
<a href="#">2.1 Future scenarios and ideas to help shape democratic innovation in the UK</a>	10	<a href="#">Embracing innovation: Mindsets for more responsive governance</a>	35	<a href="#">Acknowledgements</a>	54
				<a href="#">About the authors and contributors</a>	54
				<a href="#">About Nesta</a>	54

# Introduction

Re-energising and  
reimagining democracy



# About this paper

This paper explores unashamedly optimistic routes and future scenarios for local democracy in the UK. Whilst national politics and general elections may dominate our understanding of democracy, many of our experiences of civic participation are based in our communities, villages, cities and towns. Working together, a number of the Democracy Pioneers and other leading experts in the field took part in a series of online workshops to create a vision for vibrant local everyday democracy in the near future. You can explore these scenarios and possible routes for innovation using the interactive scenarios at <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/democracy-pioneers/>.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive exploration of every trend, but a scenario based on signals of change and the experiences of current democracy innovators in the UK. Whilst we hope that this exploration

provides practical ways to reshape and re-energise local democratic participation, what is more important is developing clear ways to work together, better enabling all democratic actors to recast local democracy.

The paper outlines the thinking and inspiration for possible future scenarios, and considers where next for innovation to support these types of democratic innovations. We also outline useful resources and developments in the field, which we hope will fuel much-needed democratic innovation in the UK in the coming years.

# 1.1

## The need for democratic innovation

Across the world, democracy is struggling. Commentators, academics and leaders have increasingly argued that our democratic institutions, processes and ways of organising are no longer fit for the challenges and opportunities that we face.

These commentators are not alone. Analysis in 2019 found the highest level of democratic discontent on record – and this was before COVID-19 tested democracies even further. Many now see tensions: between citizens and politicians; polarising issues like Leave and Remain; a desire for party politics and politicians who work together and politicians who are both normal and extraordinary; being more involved in democracy and decision-making yet being led by politicians who can take decisions on our behalf; between having clear reliable information and expertise and involving a broad range of people;

and between the formal and the informal parts of our democracy.

For too many people, democracy remains something done far away, exercised only when we cast our vote every five years, if at all. Democracy too often feels disconnected from the very real things that shape all of our lives – health and social care, education, housing, safety, the economy, and our neighbourhoods. Over time a gap has grown between the way in which citizens go about their daily lives and the way in which politics and democracy are carried out.

Every other part of our lives – how we shop, work, connect and socialise – has changed radically over the last few decades, particularly as we have adopted digital technology. This is one of many factors that has contributed to declining trust and confidence in democratic institutions.

There have been many interesting examples of democratic innovation during the pandemic, from the worldwide acceleration of the adoption of digital to Taiwan's much celebrated success of citizen engagement in the crisis. But it has also tested democracies hugely. Freedom House, in its Democracy under Lockdown work, found that the pandemic has further fueled a crisis for democracy around the world, with the condition of democracy and human rights growing worse in 80 countries. Cases across the world outline a weakening and shuttering of institutions and an erosion of human rights, undermining the very systems of accountability needed to protect public health and support the response and recovery from the pandemic.

Although there has been a return to the public valuing experts and professionals, as the crisis hit many felt that we needed

more democracy and public participation, not less, to create legitimate, fair and more imaginative possibilities to respond, recover and renew in the face of the crisis. Citizens' energy in connecting, helping each other, and supporting communities and neighbourhoods through mutual aid has also presented a real opportunity for us to shape decisions and action in our communities.

# 1.2

## Nesta's interest in democratic innovation and the Democracy Pioneers programme

Over the last decade, Nesta has researched, championed and supported a range of innovations in civic participation and democracy: from our work making the case for more people-powered public services in local government and health; ways to shape a more socially impactful sharing economy; calling for a high energy democracy to support an inclusive economy; research and practical experimentation around digital democracy and participation with projects such as DCent or mapping and championing democratic digital social innovation; to more recent explorations of collective intelligence and participatory futures.

The UK's last election saw a tearing down of the old right/left divisions, with new fractures emerging based on Leave/Remain or city/country. And whilst these seismic shifts were much discussed, there was still a growing discontent with democracy and

little discussion about the prospect of greater democratic innovation to address underlying challenges. Whole swathes of valuable activity remain on the margins, rarely discussed in mainstream media as opportunities to engage more people and help address some of the challenges we face.

Across the country innovation bubbles away. There are projects that combat the spread of misinformation; approaches that promote campaign transparency and awareness; new ways of crowdsourcing key voter information; initiatives that coach and support excluded individuals to lead change; methods that create space for disagreement; work that fuels community-led campaigning and youth activism; and alternative approaches that show how our future democracy could be better informed, more inclusive, participatory, open, transparent, smart and creative, and based on increasing trust and accountability.

There has also been growing energy and excitement around the potential of deliberative democracy to address some of the big challenges we face, with a positivity not only about experimentation with new models but also about how such changes could be institutionalised. The [UK Climate Assembly](#) and programmes such as [Innovation in Democracy](#) support this kind of experimentation, with local authorities looking to explore how [deliberative forms of democracy](#) can become an important focus of change in the UK. Yet without greater support, the innovations that show possibility remain on the margins.

To recognise and support examples of pioneering innovations broadening and deepening democracy in the UK, Nesta launched the [Democracy Pioneers Award](#) in December 2019. Nineteen innovations were recognised with a £10,000 award

to support their work, and were brought together over a six month period to share, learn and collaborate on areas of interest together.

Creating a thicker, deeper, and more collaborative field of actors has so often proved critical in catalysing innovation when looking across the major social changes of our time, and this is no different. The programme focused on establishing practical ways for different organisations to work together, building momentum behind a collective movement, and exploring the future of democracy. This paper explores that future.



Exploring possible  
futures for local civic  
participation and  
everyday democracy



# 2.1

Future scenarios and ideas to help shape democratic innovation in the UK

Working together, a number of Democracy Pioneers, researchers, practitioners and experts in the field came together to explore ideas, visions, trends and scenarios for more vibrant local everyday democracy in the near future.

This research isn't about predicting the future but trying to inspire it. Whilst we hope that the exploration provides practical ways for reshaping and re-energising local democratic participation, the process also helped us experiment with ways to bring democratic innovators together, exploring how innovations could create more systemic change when brought together as a democratic ecosystem.

**“Innovation starts with a story about the future. Imagining and sharing desires and fears about the future is a way for all of us to shape it.”**  
**Futures researcher**

To shape the scenarios and ideas for the future we carried out a four stage process:

### 1. Research

We started the process with a rapid literature review. At the same time, we carried out qualitative interviews with academics, people with strong professional experience in local democracy and democratic innovation, the Nesta Democracy Pioneers and the wider network of democratic innovators in the UK. This was designed to tap into both theoretical expertise and the experiences of people working to build better democracy in the UK, informing key drivers, barriers, enablers and trends for democratic innovation.

### 2. Exploration and futures workshops

We ran two workshops with the Democracy Pioneers and others to explore the future of local democracy. As part

of this, participants developed more than two hundred ways to forge routes and opportunities for democratic innovation. These helped groups create scenarios of how a place or site in their local community could transform into a high energy democracy. As a final exercise we mapped connections between future scenarios and visions.

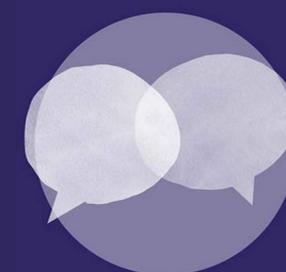
### 3. Synthesis

During the interviews and workshops we identified more than two hundred ideas for place-based democratic innovations and more than one hundred and eighty goals to drive future democratic innovation. These were then clustered into six actionable and inspiring areas for future democratic innovation, with thirty-three everyday democratic interactions.

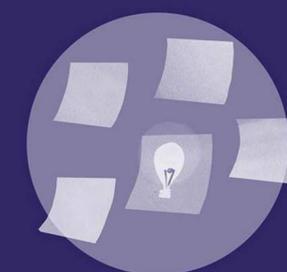
### 4. Storytelling

Together these ideas and scenarios have been weaved together to create an interactive story of near-future local democracy.

Next, we'll share the thinking behind the narrative and what this might mean for democratic innovation in the UK. You can explore the story and future scenarios in more detail at <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/democracy-pioneers/>. What would your future vision look like? What would you want to see happen and how might we get there?



Research



Workshops



Synthesis



Storytelling

# 2.2

## Inspiring more democratic innovation: Routes to high energy local civic participation and democracy

The Future of Everyday Democracy sets out democratic innovation scenarios for possible near-futures in an imaginary place in the UK. The interactive story is designed to inspire, provoke, and prompt ideas through exploring a version of what everyday democracy could look like across different areas of our lives. It explores the potential for reimagining how we participate at the local level, informed by innovations that already exist or that are on the near horizon, helping us see routes for positive change both now and in the future.

In fact, while we talk a lot about the future, in reality many of these changes could be achieved right now. In our interviews and explorations with Democracy Pioneers, we heard repeated feedback that focus is too often placed on individual products or service innovations and too little on the institutions, architecture and changes to behaviors, mindsets and ways of working that are

needed to make these innovations work at scale.

Furthermore, too little is done to join up innovations that help create ecologies that make larger shifts possible, keeping innovations on the margins. More needs to be done to create cohesive ecologies at the level of neighbourhood or place, designing ways for informal and formal, older and newer approaches to mature. Making shifts and enabling democratic innovations to thrive also requires current processes and institutions to adopt – and in some cases to deliberately stop doing things and dismantle legacy models.

We know these types of changes are possible. Across the world in Taiwan, Bologna, Helsinki, Paris and Barcelona, to name but a few, places are demonstrating the possibilities. In the UK, work from Participatory City

in Barking and Dagenham, the vision for Civic Square in Birmingham, Flatpack Democracy, or the Innovation in Democracy experimentation in Cambridge, Dudley and Test Valley show that experimentation and local democratic innovation is possible.

There is no silver bullet to support democratic innovation in the UK. But there are many green shoots and innovations that with experimentation and significant shifts to how we institutionalise and grow ideas show high potential. We should not underestimate the resources and efforts required to forge this future – but we can only get there if we imagine what is possible.

**“There needs to be greater realisation that everyone is part of democracy in a place.”**

Local government interviewee

# People-centred democracy: Reframing democracy around people, not parties



## Scenario

By 2030 we use a variety of ways to involve people in decision-making and design of services and neighbourhoods. Local places will enable a participatory culture, and taking part will be better designed around how we live our day-to-day lives. There is a better understanding of how and why individuals would want to participate, and the opportunities for participation are easy. There are compelling stories about how citizens collectively shape big and small changes in our communities and lives, enabling people to understand why their involvement matters and what change they can create. Elected leaders and public sector officers see the value of a higher energy democracy and the participation of a more diverse range of people in their communities. Together, these approaches help create smarter decisions and draw more upon the creativity, knowledge and expertise of all citizens.



## The opportunity

**“We need to create a way where anybody has the opportunity to play an active role in their local community and make decisions that benefit everybody.”**

Local government interviewee

There are a number of ideas and examples for how to accelerate the shift towards people-centred democracy by empowering citizens to lead change in their local areas. People who are in elected office should better represent the diversity of the communities they serve. Everyone should be able to participate if they want to, with attractive opportunities to participate and more inclusive and transparent processes better designed around our everyday experiences. They are incidental rather than difficult to find and engage with – people can get involved wherever their interests or experiences lie. They also deliberately seek to be

more inclusive of people from underrepresented groups, particularly black and minority ethnic communities and people with disabilities.

**“We need to expand our understanding of “expertise” to account for lived experience. If you live in a street and you feel you’re going to genuinely be listened to, the fact that you live there and lived there for 5 years should be considered more important – in terms of what we’re gonna do about traffic for instance – than some external councillor’s view.”**

Democracy activist interviewee

Institutions are willing to trust citizens and be open about processes and decisions; new ways of operating have been adopted, where formal institutions and public services understand the assets of citizens and their communities. Those in positions of power act as enablers, providing the conditions and

infrastructure for communities to flourish rather than being seen solely as service providers.

**“Councillors and elected officials should act as advocates and enablers for communities to do things for themselves, rather than doing it for them.”**

Local government interviewee

There are a wealth of participatory methods and processes that better enable and facilitate people-centred local democracy. Rather than adopting the latest trend, there is huge opportunity to weave and mesh together different methods through local experimentation, enabling approaches to democracy across our lives from our neighbourhoods, workplaces or communities to formal institutions like local authorities. Mixing representative and other forms of democracy including co-production, deliberative processes, and other forms

of engagement such as participatory budgeting can help make this shift.

A participatory culture could be created from the earliest point in our lives, and doesn't need to wait until we are legally allowed to vote. Young people should be regularly engaged to ensure our decisions, services and communities better understand and are shaped by the needs and experiences of all of our communities.

## What challenges are hindering this type of democratic innovation?

Too little is currently done to shift understanding of democratic participation, away from simply voting in general elections to the variety of ways we can shape issues we care about. Processes and approaches can be intimidating, or lack relevance and meaning for people.

Current structures of participation can also reinforce inequalities, making it even harder for those least represented to have a say. Within democratic bodies, there is also a need for better governance, transparency and accessibility of processes if citizen involvement initiatives are to be meaningful.

**“The people who have the most time to participate can put in more effort. If someone has to hold down three jobs, the time it takes to get involved can be quite demanding.”**

Civil society interviewee

**“By the time you get to the meeting, all the decisions have already been made.”**

Civil society interviewee

Many democracy innovations are also designed to be non-partisan – but politics matters, and it can be difficult for innovations and

organisations to hold the tension between these positions. As one local government interviewee put it, there is a reluctance to acknowledge that engagement and participation are driven by party politics.

Time and time again, interviewees emphasized a lack of collaboration or support for civic projects and initiatives based on shared goals for change. Innovators instead saw progress where *everyone* is seen as part of the story of shaping the place, not just formal institutions or standard processes.

## Signals of change

There are initiatives today that illuminate the plausible direction of change.

Innovators are changing the narrative about democracy and participation. Say Yes To Tess is a musical based on Tess Seddon's real life experience of standing for the Yorkshire Party in the 2017 UK General Election. The play asks whether politics or the systems around it are working, and encourages the audience to imagine a fully representative democracy. Music helps motivate people to participate, with the aim of reclaiming the emotional and connective power of narrative to reach people who are not engaged and encourage them to participate in their communities and politics.

As well as working to change the narrative of democratic participation, innovators are creating new ways to bring people back into

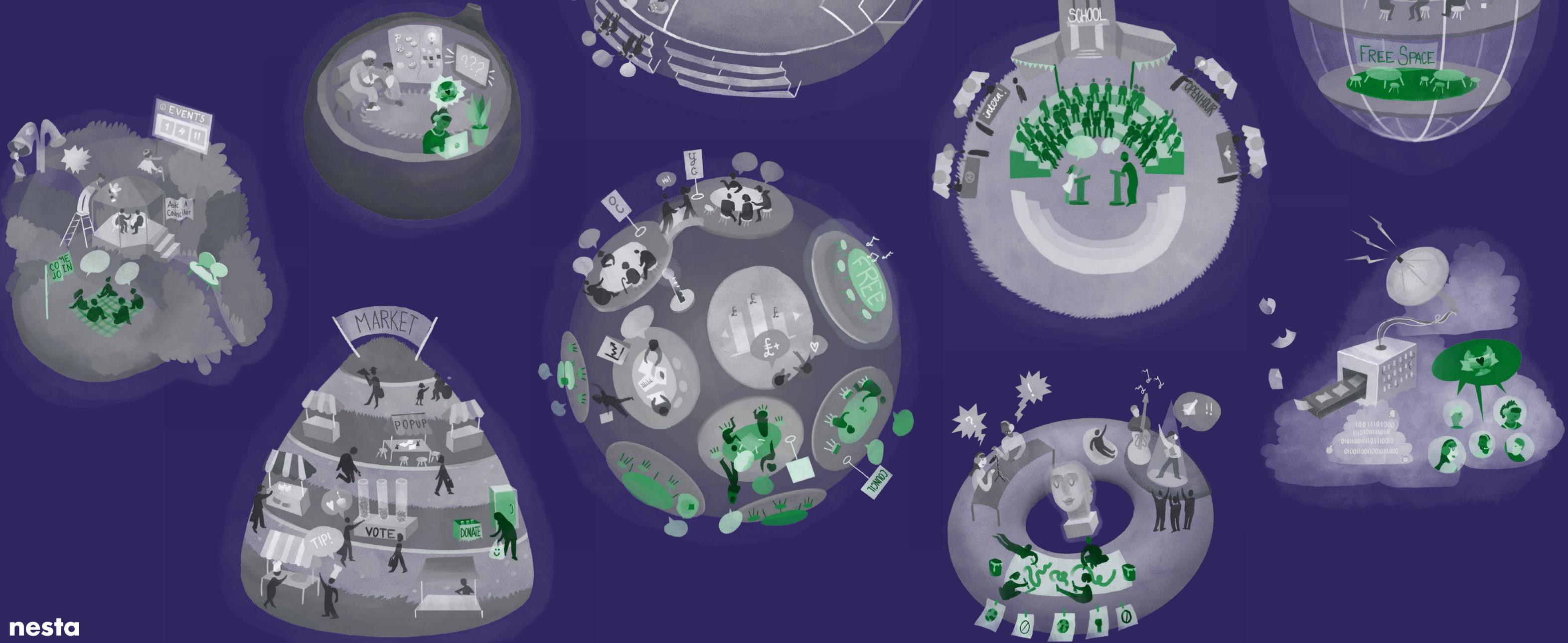
democracy through their local communities. Frome Council and others are using the Flatpack Democracy model to elect independent representatives focused on involving the community in delivering key shared priorities. In this model, citizens lead the change in a way that is visible, valued and impactful.

Participation and involvement are also being reshaped across entire places. Participatory City in Barking and Dagenham work with thousands of amazing residents to build networks of friendship through the Every One, Every Day initiative. They aim to co-create the first large-scale, fully inclusive, practical participatory ecosystem. In the City of Bologna, the Office of Civic Imagination is working to recognise citizen activism as a tool for change and to create a partnership between the city and its citizens. The work is completely dedicated to citizen participation and focused on a scale-up to a more integrated system of co-design

of urban action. It works at a neighbourhood level with action labs to create change with thousands of citizens.

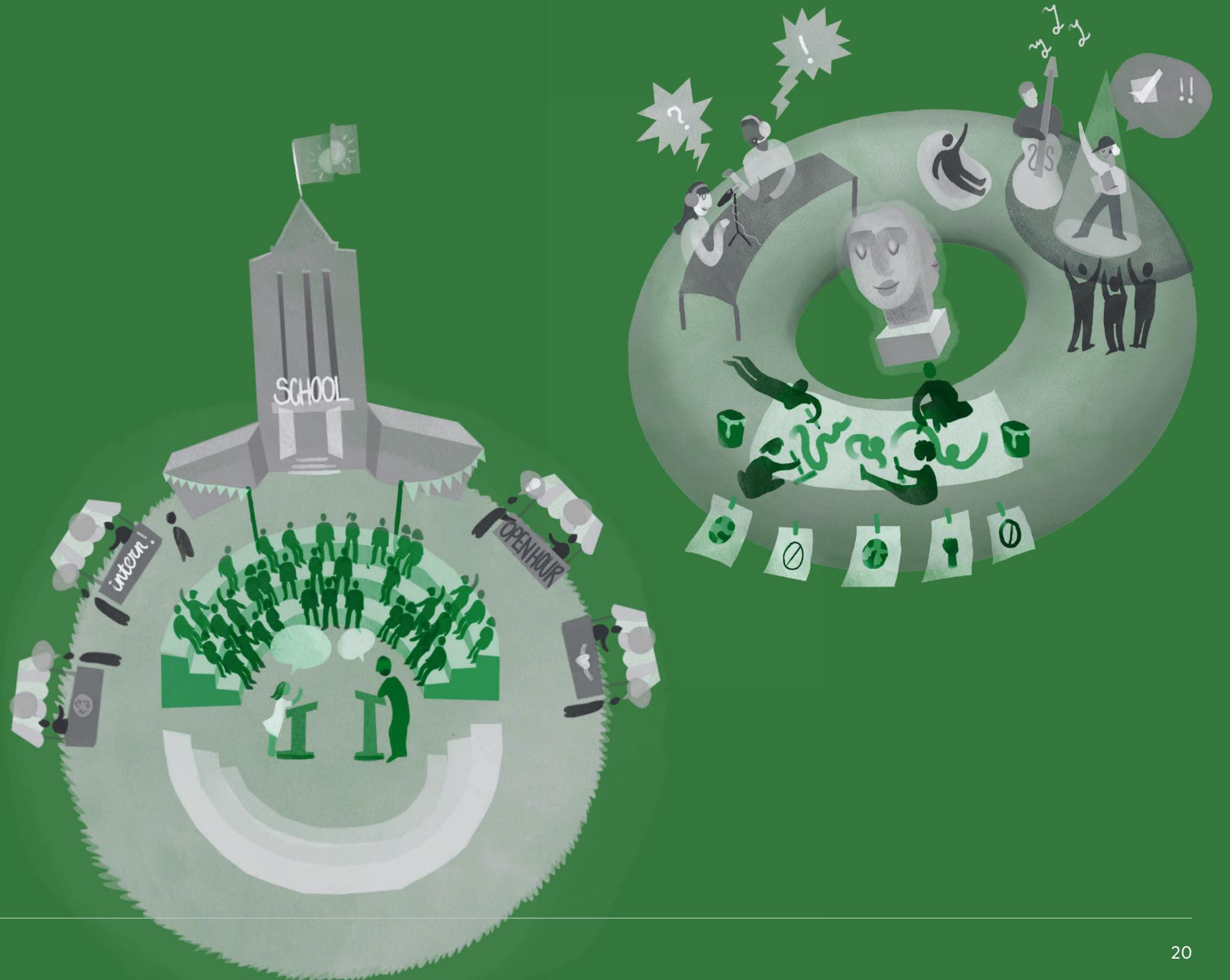
To change perceptions of democracy from a focus on elections and voting, innovations are working in new ways to embed democratic processes in other aspects of our daily lives. Community co-ops such as Brighton Energy Co-op, employee ownership schemes, and community wealth building initiatives such as those developed in Preston all demonstrate how our involvement affects very real issues from the local economy to our energy and expenses.

# Vibrant hubs: Strengthening and mobilising existing communities



## Scenario

By 2030 all communities have access to strong social infrastructure that helps connect, create and build networks for decision-making and change. Our social infrastructure (including digital and physical spaces) facilitates a culture of participation, supporting a wave of civic revival in neighbourhoods where we can connect, debate, disagree and come together to create deeply embedded high energy democracy. Both formal and informal community leaders and connectors work together with and alongside communities to build an ecology of democracy based on trust, sharing information and connecting resources to ideas and energy in neighbourhoods and communities.



## The opportunity

There are many routes to embed participatory culture at a local level. When participatory democracy augments representative democracy, institutions embrace participatory ways of working and political parties adopt a participatory culture, the scene will be set for real improvement in the strengthening of local democratic ecosystems. Practically, mechanisms that institutionalise participatory democracy are important. There are many techniques and approaches for democratic participation, but more can be achieved if there is greater experimentation of how these approaches can work together.

Innovators and interviewees shared that they often found the most exciting opportunities when approaches are combined to involve different groups and different perspectives, building from a range of strengths in

**“The town councillors decided to go to the football club, cricket club and rugby club to have a series of three well-facilitated “open-cafe” meetings outside of the council – one to get to know each other, one to start discussing the issues, one to draw up a strategy. Seventy or eighty people went, local people knew what to expect from the meeting, knew they’d be home at 9pm.”**

Democracy activist interviewee

communities and looking at the intersectionality of challenges.

**"We have a youth parliament... 6th formers. They run like a parliament and they run themselves. They have a councillor who is assigned to them for guidance. It would be a really good idea to have an older people's parliament."**

Civil society interviewee

The allocation of resources by local authorities and public services, or the raising of additional local taxes by councils, has been used in some places to create the conditions for new democratic innovation. Investment is needed both for experimentation and to support longer term implementation.

Approaches that reallocate resources from local budgets and use participatory approaches to enable people to decide how to use them

locally have become much more common. Allowing communities to have monetary resources alone is not enough, though: designing processes and creating inclusive and open approaches are absolutely necessary to unlock the potential of these approaches.

## **What challenges are hindering this type of democratic innovation?**

In recent years, there have been real challenges in the UK for resourcing and funding social infrastructure, with our parks, libraries, high streets and community centres all facing huge threats and challenges. Our social infrastructure is the bedrock of how communities connect, share and create change – but, without new and innovative ways of funding, this infrastructure may continue to struggle.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the role and potential of digital infrastructure, but also given us an appreciation of what can and should be done face-to-face. Yet there remains relatively little experimentation around this to enable further democratic innovation.

Existing social infrastructure has not always been inclusive or open. Communities may also not be geographically defined, so better ways to engage and involve people with different personal interests are needed if we are to be more inclusive.

## Signals of Change

There are initiatives today that illuminate the plausible direction of change.

Be Buckfastleigh is a community organisation based in Devon, whose aim is to transform community participation and power in 'forgotten' rural towns through strategic and local collaboration, engagement and delivery. They have developed new funding resources through increasing council taxes and created participatory processes within their town's decision-making functions to bring together and involve local citizens, reflecting the diversity of experience that exists within Buckfastleigh. This work built on the success in Frome, which has designed its local democratic processes to involve everyone, based in the spaces and places that people really use. They have also created new social infrastructure such as community fridges.

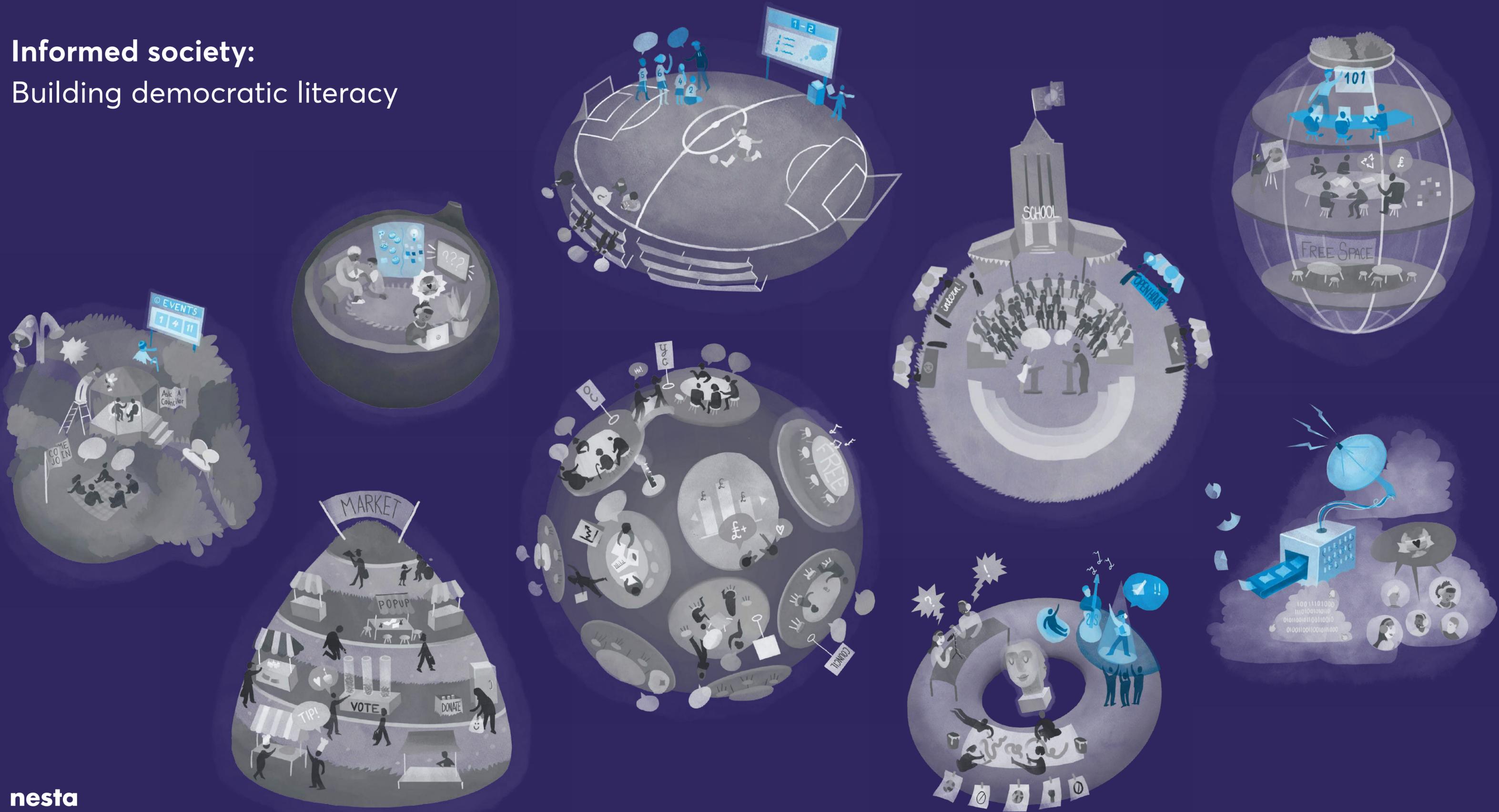
Barking and Dagenham's Participatory City has created new social infrastructure using the high street and community spaces to enable people to practically connect and move towards participation in ways that suit them. Organisations such as Oxford Hub aim to build new relationships in the community, connecting formal public sector actors with civil society and local citizens to forge new solutions.

New approaches to funding and supporting social infrastructure through crowdfunding, and approaches to place-based funding from Local Trust and Power to Change, demonstrate how we might use resources differently. There are a huge number of methods and tools that can be used to involve people more effectively, and different areas are adopting and experimenting with these in new ways. Fife Council's Let's Talk programme engages the community through

consultation on issues that matter to them, such as transport and participatory budgeting, but also draws on broad experience and community ownership over local decisions.

Effective and vibrant communities are diverse and inclusive communities, and great innovations create platforms that connect people from diverse backgrounds. The Roots Programme brings together people from different walks of life by giving them a space to meet, talk and debate matters that affect them, and My Country Talks sets up one-to-one discussions between people with completely different views to establish new forms of political debate.

# Informed society: Building democratic literacy



## Scenario

By 2030, citizens are supported to collaboratively develop the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to adapt to and participate in the world around them, scrutinise and evaluate information, and actively find new ways to engage with civic processes. People have new ways to practice democracy, combat misinformation and reliably access the information they need to participate. Schools, universities and civil society organisations are key actors in this process, reimagining how they provide education, improving the design and accessibility of information technologies and creating opportunities for citizens to practice a range of different forms of democracy. There are strong independent sources of public and local interest news that help hold local decision-making to account. Together, there is a mature ecology that can

better counteract disinformation with high quality media, reduce the spread of misinformation, and disarm the impact of disinformation.



## The opportunity

Democracy is not just about decision-making – it's about having the skills, knowledge and understanding to properly engage with civic processes. Innovations to address this include helping people practice democracy, combat misinformation, and reliably access the information they need to participate.

Democratic innovations can enhance this process with better education, improved information technologies, and opportunities to practice democracy.

Innovations and interviewees outlined the opportunity to build broad, democratic education programmes that teach everyone about their roles, helps them understand processes, and provides citizens with the skills to have a meaningful impact in local democracy. Upskilling democratic practitioners and those leading change in local communities

with the skills and technical knowledge is also key to enable innovation. This can already be seen in a range of initiatives working with schools and youth groups to familiarise young people with their rights as citizens, democratic processes, spotting misinformation and opportunities to create change in their local area.

Sharing knowledge and information is a key enabler of innovation. Sharing research findings in accessible and varied formats such as videos, reports, blogs and open data supports and enables democratic innovation across the country. This helps keep others informed about what is being tried and tested within the democracy sector, disseminates best practice and helps make data accessible and transparent to all actors. As local contexts differ, sharing information about what works and why allows innovators to adapt and develop their programmes and projects more effectively.

**“In <place> they had a whole year of preparation where they engaged with people in the town, asking what they want, what they need. Everything was budgeted and then presented back to citizens with an ask. They increased their taxes by 89% that year.”**

Democracy activist interviewee

## What challenges are hindering this type of democratic innovation?

Access to information is a key pillar of a healthy democracy. It's what enables us to debate, make informed decisions and act together. A decade ago, many thought that social media and the internet would democratise access to information, increasing its reach and the opportunity for scrutiny. Yet the way the internet has given rise to misinformation, disinformation and echo chambers, while simultaneously decreasing trust and undermining quality and factual integrity, means it is now widely seen as a key driver of the crisis facing democracy. Citizens are concerned about democracy in a digital age. We have seen the very real challenges brought about during the COVID-19 crisis, for example, with citizens able to spread misinformation with a serious effect on trust in our democratic processes.

Very little is known about exactly how or why the current information landscape is affecting our civic and democratic actions. A review of the literature on social media, political polarisation and political disinformation details the lack of evidence or understanding on the specific impacts of disinformation on democracy, concluding that "we know little about the long-term consequences of online news consumption on political disaffection, civic knowledge, political participation, and social capital."

Actors are innovating across many different parts of the problem, with different contexts, approaches and sources of funding – and, in fact, one major challenge is the lack of independence when it comes to funding. Both testing for and evidence of solutions is patchy, though at its most comprehensive in fact-checking.

## Signals of Change

There are initiatives today that illuminate the plausible direction of change.

In order to participate fully, citizens need to develop the skills and tools to be able to engage meaningfully with the events happening around them, and the [Future News Fund Pilot](#) supported a range of innovations in this field. Innovations such as [Shout Out UK](#), [NewsWise](#) or [the Student View](#), for instance, have developed programmes that teach young people the media and political literacy skills that will enable them to be informed and critical participants in their democracy.

Citizens are routinely treated as naive and vulnerable 'subjects' of information, but given the correct tools are a huge part of combating misinformation and passing on that knowledge to others. [Recent research](#) of 15,000 people

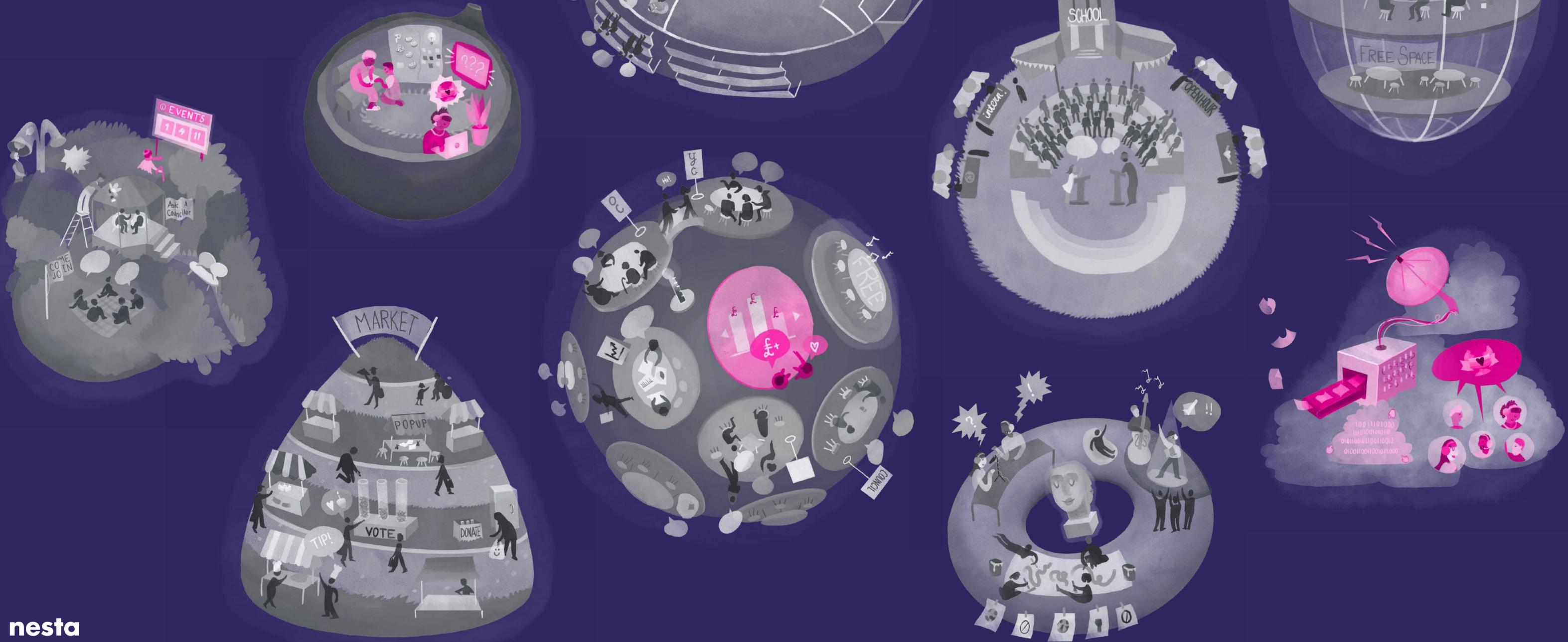
shows education helps in spotting fake news, skills that are critical to assessing the increasing volume of information we are confronted with every day. This problem is being tackled by organisations such as [Full Fact](#), who counter misleading claims by scrutinising and fact checking what's said in public, and asks politicians and the press to correct the record when they get things wrong. [Worldwide governments](#) are also working to take regulatory action to combat inaccurate or harmful information.

Sharing information is also key to giving citizens the tools they need to make informed decisions. Digital platforms like [Democracy Club](#), [Simple Politics](#), [Ad.Watch](#) and [Voting Counts](#) all work to provide citizens with information about their political choices, making information on candidates, their policies and the campaigns that they run accessible to a wide audience.

Better ways to share information that engage different groups, and particularly those that are underrepresented, are crucial to an inclusive democracy, with huge learnings to be found from civil society actors such as [Community Integrated Care](#) and [Legacy International Group](#). Organisations like [Operation Black Vote](#) or in more local contexts [Highway Hope](#) create information, campaigns, training and support structures to engage underrepresented communities, particularly black and minority ethnic communities.

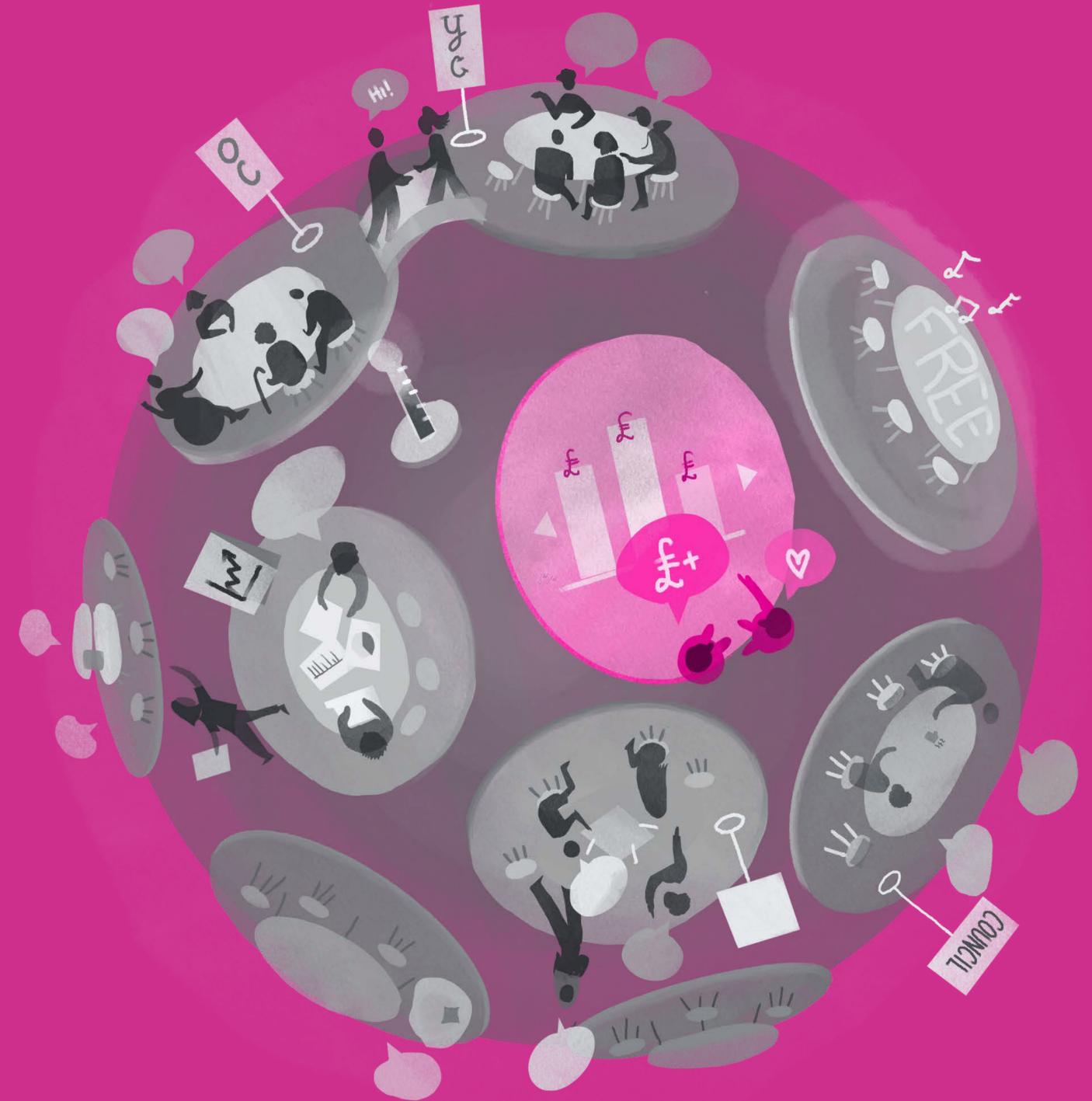
# Digital boost:

Digital tools that enhance democratic infrastructure and drive new change



## Scenario

By 2030, digital platforms and tools are integrated and used to engage and involve more people in smart and inclusive ways. Approaches harness the best of the collective intelligence of local people and machine learning. National and local governments have worked to close the digital divide, creating policies that extend network coverage and access to equipment and protect citizens while they are online. Digital tools are able to amplify physical democratic interactions and enable more inclusive and diverse audiences to participate. They also enable citizens to hold their governments accountable through greater transparency of decisions and policy implications. There is much greater use of public sector and local government actors, moving beyond transactional online engagement to deeper, more deliberative forms of democracy.



## The opportunity

New experiments have shown how digital technologies can play a critical role in engaging new groups of people, empowering citizens and forging new relationships between cities and local residents and parliamentarians and citizens. Over the last two decades there have been thousands of experiments. In some areas, such as campaigning or monitoring the actions of MPs, there is a rich field of innovation, with myriad apps, platforms and websites gaining significant numbers of users. Petitions sites, for example, can be found across much of the world in one form or another. Other experiments have focused on areas such as participatory budgeting, opening up the problem-solving process for a range of social issues, and projects that focus on how digital can enhance the more traditional activities of parliamentary and democratic work such as voting or case management.

Learning from recent digital democracy initiatives shows there is potential to further explore how to get the most from digital tools and create effective platforms for participation that are inclusive and reach and engage people who are seldom heard. Digital tools can also connect practitioners to share data and allow best practice to scale.

Development of such platforms and approaches must look at combinations of tools and approaches rather than expecting effective solutions from just one tool. Recent work to experiment with the collective intelligence of humans and machines could also unlock insights.

Digital tools can provide widespread access to information and decision-making processes and can enhance the transparency of democratic institutions – as long as there are ways to include those without easy access to

digital infrastructure. There are also innovation opportunities to develop better support systems for those less technologically literate.

## What challenges are hindering this type of democratic innovation?

Local authorities and civil society organisations in the UK have done less than in other parts of the world to experiment with digital infrastructure. [Reykjavik](#), [Amsterdam](#), [Barcelona](#), [Paris](#) and [Madrid](#) have all invested in digital democracy to enable greater scale and new, impactful forms of involvement. This of course requires investment, but also a strategic will from local authorities and public sector partners to work in new and more open ways. Without designing to shift ways of working, behaviours, and norms, innovations will often fail to work. In coming

years, there is a clear need to see much more experimentation in these areas in the UK.

From chatbots to AI-moderated online conversations, the world of digital democracy is awash with new tools. But so often it's the flashy tech that draws policymakers' attention, rather than the desire to meaningfully involve people in political decision-making.

**"There's a tendency to get hooked on the innovation, rather than thinking about how that innovation links to the day-to-day institutional structures, until the buzz dissipates and something new comes up."**

Democracy expert and practitioner interviewee

In the experience of innovators, researchers and the wider field, the best examples use digital tools as a mechanism for understanding gaps in knowledge and assessing options

(knowledge search), rather than a rough yardstick for gauging public opinion. They target specific communities or groups who have relevant knowledge, define a clear role for participants, and then feed back to them clearly about the outcomes of engagement. Purposeful engagement is key.

The dominance of 'big tech' such as Google and Facebook poses well-documented threats to democracy, with the role of data and its power, the spread of false or biased information, and a lack of transparency being some of the more obvious and dangerous challenges. Their dominance is hard to counteract without more strategic and legislative action, but can serve to make many more sceptical about the role of wide digital tools to support and improve democracy. Expertise on digital methods and tools varies significantly, which has implications for effectiveness and accessibility especially

when individual context is not adequately considered. Too often, digital tools are seen as the end rather than the means to enable a specific impact.

Crucially, as has been evident in the COVID-19 pandemic, there are huge variations in access to devices, data poverty and digital literacy. These factors can further heighten inequalities and push people who may be underrepresented even further from power and decision-making.

**"There are things going on within my area, litter groups started, but it's all done on Facebook. So unless you are on Facebook you don't know when and where they are meeting. They're getting younger people but not those who are older and fit. It is splitting the community."**

Civil society interviewee

## Signals of change

There are initiatives today that illuminate the plausible direction of change.

These initiatives are using digital tools to connect people and share information and resources. Some well-publicised examples include the work of governments in Paris through [Madame Mayor](#), Madrid through [Decide Madrid](#) and Brazil's [eDemocracia](#), all developing ideas that provide citizens with information about public processes and allow input into those processes. eDemocracia, for example, allows citizens to collaboratively edit legislative texts. Platforms are now widely available that allow for collaborative decision-making, such as [Citizen OS](#), or for deliberation and voting on political proposals, such as [Democracy OS](#).

Digital tools are also being developed that are targeted to specific audiences, thus creating greater inclusion of underrepresented groups. For young people, these tools include [Digital Surgeries](#), which connects young people and their elected representatives for meaningful interactions, or [Smart School Councils](#), who have developed a platform which changes the way primary-age students experience and learn about democracy. Their platform enables schools to embed a model of direct democracy via weekly debates in Year 1 to Year 6 classrooms, involving all pupils and making regular, youth-led engagement with democracy the norm.

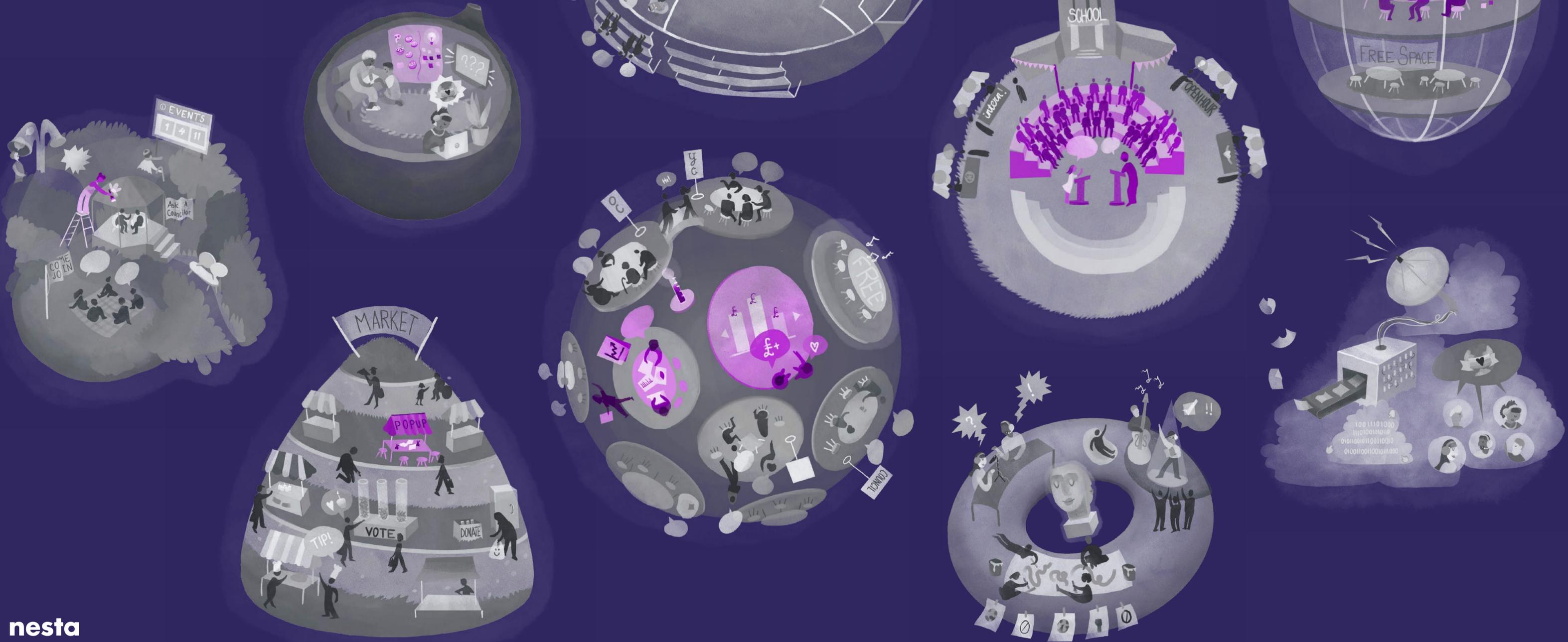
Other innovations include open source platforms such as [DECODE](#), designed to give citizens more control over their data. DECODE piloted digital democracy software in Barcelona, which enabled petitions

to be signed anonymously but in line with authentication requirements.

Experiments are also beginning to collect greater evidence so we can build a field of knowledge about what works to support digital democratic innovation. [Open North](#), a Canadian non-profit, has developed an interactive online consultation method called Citizen Budget, and is using a mixed methods approach [to understand the project's impact on its audiences](#). They created a framework to understand tangible impacts (qualitative evidence, policy decisions, reports and plans, policies, new institutions, new processes) and intangible impacts (participant empowerment, social learning, willingness to participate in the future, increased understanding and trust in government), which can act as a useful starting point for others in this space.

Examples are also growing of programmes of experimentation that bring together democratic institutions, research organisations and universities. The University of Cornell's [e-Rulemaking sandbox](#) was tested in partnership with local and national government agencies in the US, and generated a wealth of evidence-informed guidance.

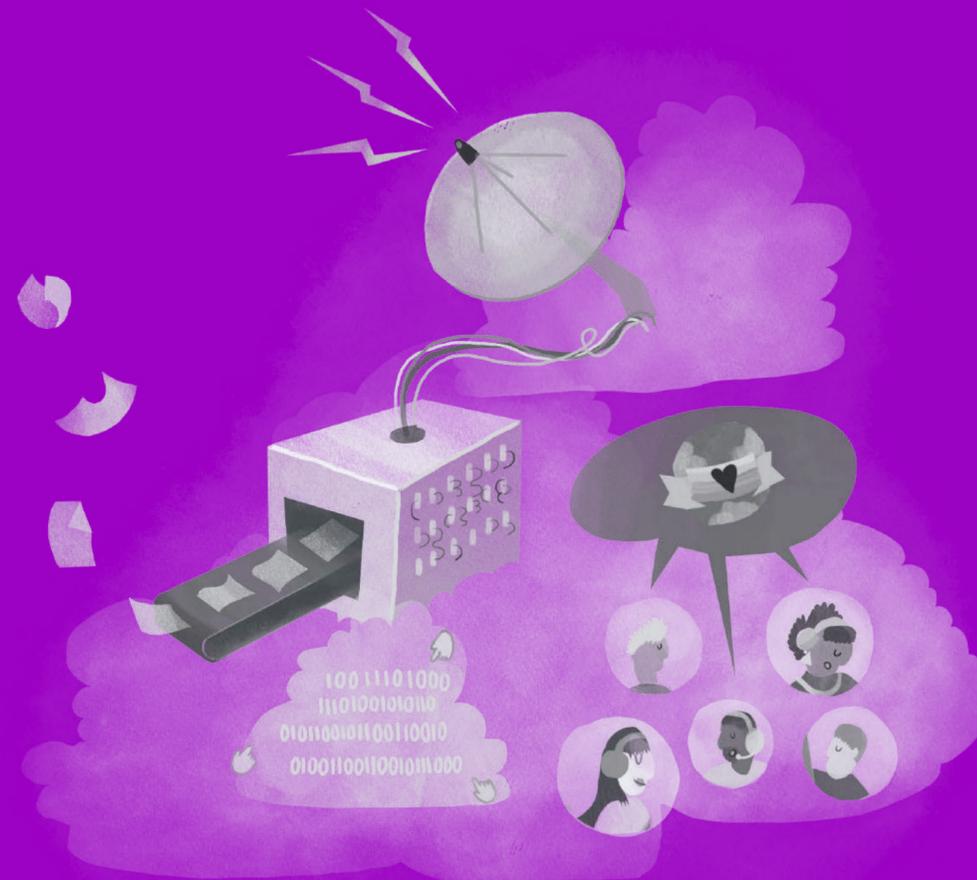
# Embracing innovation: Mindsets for more responsive governance



## Scenario

By 2030, government and local authorities are adopting new operating models that support democracy and involvement of citizens. To do this, public sector leaders and their partners have developed innovation mindsets and new ways of working, understanding that the best outcome can only be achieved by enabling and working with citizens. Together, actors have developed better metrics to evaluate and understand what a good democracy looks like, drawing on inspiration from first movers and local innovators. They now measure and incentivise all forms of participation, including how agendas are set, how communities are involved in processes and how connected citizens are. Those in positions of formal power have acknowledged that better outcomes for people are possible when they work with citizens in new ways. Examples and learning

are shared, and approaches are more agile and responsive to local needs, opportunities and ideas. With higher trust, and processes for experimentation in participation, formal institutions are more willing to take risks.



## The opportunity

Local governments and public service leaders have been experimenting and adopting new ways of working that embrace collaborative, high quality, democratic governance. An increasing number of communities have insisted that they are involved in the decisions that affect their lives, and governments are prioritising ways to work with communities to better understand challenges and opportunities, preventing problems by working and making decisions with communities. Many leading local authorities are seeking to harness the expertise and creativity of citizens and communities, working more collaboratively in more agile, timely and citizen-focused ways.

**“The opportunity lies in people’s appetite for doing things differently and taking risks. Which also means creating an ethos of trying things and learning from failure.”**

Democracy activist interviewee

There is a clear appetite for change, with a wave of local leaders seeking to experiment with models of citizens’ assemblies and participatory budgeting. This appetite for doing things in new ways can unlock greater experimentation in a broad range of ways, but must be moved beyond a trend. Rather than just tweaking current ways of working, new approaches change the institutional architecture of our democracy and the social contract that exists between citizens and the state. Governments are realising that to rebuild trust in democracy, power needs to be shared more equitably between citizens and government.

**“They can change their role, ultimately changing the way communities are run: a good town council becomes a resource itself, and its role becomes resourcing strengthening the community and voluntary sector, rather than providing resources to the people.”**

Democracy activist interviewee

Key to this shift is developing better metrics to evaluate and reward good democracy. Democracy is often measured by electoral turnout, when in fact it is increasingly centered around the everyday participation, energy and connectedness of local people. Measuring and then incentivising these forms of participation is an important area for future work.

## What challenges are hindering this type of democratic innovation?

**“In many institutions there are power dynamics where you feel you need permission to contribute. People should know that they don’t need permission to participate in conversations about what they want from their city.”**

Democracy practitioner interviewee

Many of our democratic processes are stuck in traditionalism, with few incentives to change and do things differently. It often takes bold individuals to make change happen. Additionally, there is a lack of a clear vision on why councils should strive for democratic innovation: innovators and researchers highlighted how targets and institutional incentives can hinder progress

or mean that shifts in ways of working are more difficult, and many noted a lack of helpful metrics or indicators of democratic performance available to support leaders and officers to create change. This is an area that people felt was highly neglected, and received little scrutiny or attention. The consequences could be felt in areas that were monitored and scrutinised, including the vital services provided to citizens, but this was seldom connected.

Secondly, despite the attention that citizens’ assemblies and new methods are receiving, external recommendations for change generally dwarf councils’ capacity to respond. In a context of general budget cuts and austerity, scant resources and funding are available for participation programs, limiting the opportunities for experimentation and diversity of approaches.

**“People spend years to build the space that will allow them to make decisions. The kind of challenges that they normally face to get there are not usually conducive to opening up, to having a more participatory orientation.”**

Academic interviewee

Lack of strategic expertise and support can make change slow. Innovators, researchers and practitioners shared their experiences of conflicts between those trying to incrementally improve ways of work and those seeking more radical change. But without support, resources, and expertise, even the best democratic innovations are failing to get institutional traction and remain on the periphery.

**“When projects are funded, no money is put into cultural change. It’s all about input and how we do the participation.”**

Academic interviewee

Finally, initiatives to shift power and build more meaningful systems of democratic engagement by institutions will only be effective where there is trust in citizens to be able to make decisions about their local area and factors affecting their lives.

**“The truth is: you can’t really reform through citizen engagement if there is a fundamental lack of trust in the relationship.”**

Academic interviewee

## Signals of Change

There are initiatives today that illuminate the plausible direction of change.

A number of examples illustrate the openness of councils and other institutions to consider the importance of innovating in democratic processes. Across the country, local government innovators are experimenting with different ways to address complex challenges, moving attention and resources upstream to create the conditions that enable citizens to thrive. Twenty [local authorities worked with Nesta and Collaborate](#) to share the new operating models they are adopting, including new mindsets, behaviours and ways of working.

Initiatives such as Glasgow City Council's Participatory Budgeting for Climate Change programme and Kirklees Council's [Democracy](#)

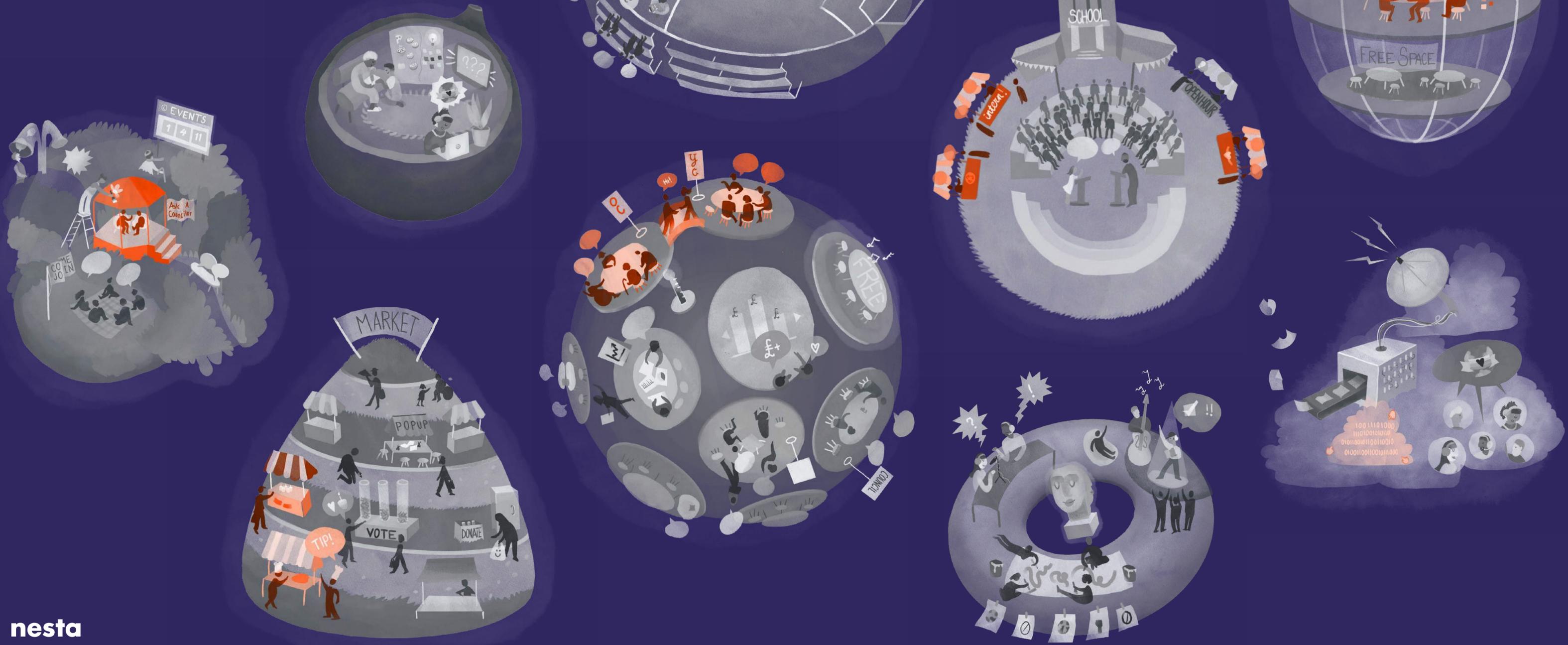
[Friendly Schools](#) programme show types of change underway. Following the Kirklees Democracy Commission, in 2016, Kirklees Council have developed programmes to embrace democratic innovation, with the goal of designing an inclusive democracy for the next generation. The Democracy Friendly Schools programme, for example, aims to create coherent civic pathways for every young person in Kirklees. Elsewhere, [Newham Democracy and Civic Participation Commission](#) heard from hundreds of local residents, community groups, councillors, and national experts about how to improve local democracy in Newham, and are now exploring ways to turn this into action.

[Public Square](#) is investigating what is needed to improve participation and identify unfilled needs. Work has included practical experimentation to support and prototype innovation and will produce a common

framework, including techniques and resources that support improved participation. Building on the surge of interest in deliberative democracy internationally, the [Innovation in Democracy programme](#) in the UK trialled the involvement of citizens in decision-making at local government level through innovative models of deliberative democracy. This experimentation has prompted participating councils to think about broader adoption of this approach and what this would require.

Internationally, the [vTaiwan](#) approach, which provides a neutral platform to engage experts and relevant members of the public in large-scale deliberation on specific topics, has been heralded as a leading global innovation and seen to be a critical approach in [Taiwan's success in managing COVID-19](#).

# Strong networks: A collaborative democracy sector



## Scenario

By 2030, organisations and individuals supporting and championing democracy are well connected in the local, UK-wide and international democracy network. Together, changemakers create a better ecology for democratic change to support us to live better lives. The democracy field has ways to regularly share learning and resources and campaign for changes that support innovation and renewal. The network enables new ways of working to scale, both geographically and organisationally, by pooling information for a collective understanding of the field, reducing duplication of effort and decreasing competition for audiences or funding.



## The opportunity

Forming networks of practitioners and linking these across sectors with strong stakeholder partnerships is key to strengthening democratic experiences in local areas. Networks can better support strategic and practical experimentation, use resources more effectively, and coordinate and drive for change. Communities of practice within public services, civil society organisations, and more broadly can help reduce duplication of effort and competition for audiences or funding.

## What challenges are hindering this type of democratic innovation?

The democracy field has often been identified as lacking a mature ecology that supports experimentation and grows the best

approaches. As a field, it is in many ways still ill-defined. This lack of clarity was felt to have impact in a number of ways. Firstly, formal local and national government institutions are often not sufficiently open, making it difficult for innovations and civil society changemakers to connect with and grow great approaches. It can be only by chance that some trends take hold, whilst others fail to get any attention at all.

Secondly, interviewees, innovations and the literature suggested that whilst innovation can be found in distinct areas such as grassroots community organising, policy-orientated change and digital and civic tech, there is a lack of connection and experimentation between these areas. This often results in silos or competition between methods, rather than more citizen-centred and collaborative approaches.

**“Organisations should admit we need one another, as more collaboration would help opening up more answers.”**  
Civil society interviewee

Thirdly, interviewees, innovations and literature indicated a lack of learning, evaluation and systematic approaches to scale successful initiatives within geographies but also across policy areas, institutions and communities of interest. And there is a failure to connect the democratic change with issues that matter – our health, social care, education, neighbourhoods and many other issues. Often innovation can become focused on things like technical changes to voting or ways of organising data, which are incredibly important – but fail to connect to a wider vision of change. It is hard to rally people around such fundamental changes, and they may not necessarily connect with what citizens want or need or what will build demand for change.

There are, however, real practical barriers for the ecology of the democracy field to mature. There are relatively few resources,

and too few incentives for collaboration and learning. Funding outside of public services is predominantly available in small pots, which minimises possible scale and impact.

**“We’re all connected,  
but we don’t necessarily  
collaborate.”**

Civil society interviewee

## Signals of Change

There are initiatives today that illuminate the plausible direction of change.

A number of approaches are helping to pool knowledge and expertise and support the spread of innovation practice. [Participedia](#) is a global network and crowdsourcing platform for anyone interested in public participation and democratic innovation, while Nesta's work on Collective Intelligence seeks to build the field of and interest in collective intelligence and democracy in the UK and globally. The OECD runs an [innovative citizen participation network](#) that seeks to understand and share great practice across countries; [Koreo](#), funded by the [Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust](#), have launched a [UK Democracy Map](#) to help better understand and connect the field. Joe Mitchell recently published research [on networking for](#)

[democracy](#), and [Newspeak House](#), alongside partners, are coordinating a Handbook for Democracy, a crowdsourced library of tools, and services and resources relating to UK democracy.

Locally, there are great examples of networks that can champion and build on the grassroots innovations happening across the UK and the world. The [People's Powerhouse](#) is a network of over a thousand organisations and individuals from across the North of England working to increase the diversity of voices in the conversations about the future of the North. The network helps to join up and celebrate good work in participatory democracy, as well as talking to local people about their priorities and how they can be supported to make a change on a local, regional or national level. [Be Buckfastleigh](#) are also working to join up local movements to reinvigorate town and parish councils

in rural towns in the South West, sharing learning and promoting the cause across the region.

# Re-energising democratic innovation in the UK



Our ability to imagine new ways to improve our democracy is a challenge. In the maze of politics and traditions, and amidst declining trust and disconnection with formal democracy, we have perhaps lost confidence in thinking about how things could be different in practice. Whilst individual ideas and products are developed and sometimes implemented, there is little done to grow new ecosystems to support participation and democratic innovation. The urgency and need for democratic innovation is just as great as the challenges of ageing populations, increasing inequalities, or the climate crisis – how we do democracy fundamentally shapes our ability to address these challenges.

The changes to democracy and civic participation imagined in this paper and in the interactive scenario <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/democracy-pioneers/> would add up to a fundamental shift in how people

understand and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and the services and neighbourhoods we all need. They may or may not be your preferred ideas or scenarios, and you may have bigger, bolder, better ideas that could also shape the future better. But what is most important is that we all start to reimagine the ecologies, systems, processes, institutions, and interactions of our democracy in new ways, keeping the best and bringing in the new. We think there should be thousands of these explorations around the country, imagining what democracy and civic innovation could look like in the coming years. These conversations and processes must create new spaces for citizens to revisit the meaning of democracy itself, allowing a reconnection with our roles and what we want from our institutions. Methods and approaches outlined in work such as our toolkit on participatory futures, [Our Futures: By the People, For the People](#), or in the

**“Let’s not call it democracy, because people don’t like that word. Let’s call it changing the world.”**  
Civil society interviewee

resources we outline in Section 4 of this paper are a good place to start these plans.

We should not underestimate the effort required to make these ideas and scenarios into reality. The way to these changes is obscured by uncertainties: not only are the effects of other shifts that influence our democracy impossible to predict, but there are also serious challenges in resourcing and getting traction for experimentation to make some of these shifts in reality. As we have outlined, there are lots of innovations that offer potential solutions, but they often lack a deep connection with existing institutions and ways of working, and there is too little done to design the holistic change required. Without further dedicated investment in democratic innovation and incentives to support focused experimentation, many innovations are liable to remain on the margins.

However, as we have outlined both internationally and in the UK, much of the energy for change in these areas is coming from local government, and there is huge scope for cities and towns to take action that demonstrates how this can be done. To do this, traditional siloed forms of working need to be replaced with something more cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary, and there must be clear incentives and motivation for civil servants to embrace innovative new approaches. A culture of experimentation must be encouraged, with failure accepted as part of the process. As we have outlined, local authorities across the country are adopting new operating models and new ways of working with citizens and communities. Whilst this has not yet reached the governance or formal democratic processes of these organisations, appetite for change is growing.

The current moment serves as a rallying cry to think more consciously about the democracy that will serve us best in recovering from COVID-19 and help us face the opportunities and challenges of the coming years. The crisis has shone a light on entrenched inequalities, showing who it is we don't hear from when we're shaping democratic choices, services and decisions.

In the light of the crisis a number of organisations, including a collaboration between Involvement and the University of Westminster, have been sharing perspectives from a variety of contributors on how we could enhance our democracy by better involving people. These discussions are vital in helping us imagine how we can take action now. Decisions being made now and in the coming months and years will have huge consequences for us all – how we take these

decisions, and who we involve in doing so, will significantly shape what those consequences are. Approaches such as [Demos' Renew Normal](#), a people's commission on life after COVID-19, and [WMCA's Citizens Panel](#) seek to involve citizens to create more legitimate democratic recovery and renewal, but could also be used to test and develop bigger democratic shifts.

If we can make the shifts to ideas and ways of working imagined by the Democracy Pioneers, and harness the opportunity for democratic innovation, we can help create a more legitimate, healthy democracy – one that will truly help us come together to tackle some of the biggest challenges and opportunities of our time.

**“For someone who has worked for years on the ground, realising people’s skills are usually seen as “soft” or “simple”... it was great to see the resilience and the power of communities have actually become central to COVID-19 recovery.”**

Democracy practitioner interview

# Useful resources and links



# 4.1

## Useful resources to explore futures approaches to support democratic innovation

1. Centre for Strategic Futures. Resources for building a strategically agile public service able to manage a complex and fast-changing environment, Singapore Prime Minister's Office, <https://www.csf.gov.sg/>
2. Mulgan, Geoff, The Imaginary Crisis (and how we might quicken social and public imagination), UCL, Demos Helsinki, 2020. <https://www.demoshelsinki.fi/julkaisut/the-imaginary-crisis-and-how-we-might-quicken-social-and-public-imagination/>
3. Nordkapp, Actionable Futures Toolkit. A toolkit for building and aligning a future for an organisation, <https://futures.nordkapp.fi/>
4. Participedia. Method resource explaining how to run a Futures Workshop, <https://participedia.net/method/4796>
5. Ramos, Jose; Sweeney, John A; Peach, Kathy and Smith, Laurie, Our Futures: By the People For the People. A guide to how mass involvement in shaping the future can solve complex problems, Nesta, 2019 <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/our-futures-people-people/>
6. Smith, Scott and Ashby, Madeleine, How to Future. A guide to accessible, agile approaches which can be scaled up or down to illuminate new futures for big organizations, or clarify complexity for colleagues around a table, Kogan Page, 2020 <https://www.howtofuture.com/>
7. The Futures Toolkit: Tools for Futures Thinking and Foresight Across UK Government, Government Office for Science, 2017. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/674209/futures-toolkit-edition-1.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674209/futures-toolkit-edition-1.pdf)

# 4.2

## Useful resources on democracy and democratic innovation

1. Bennett Institute: research from the Centre for the Future of Democracy at the University of Cambridge. <https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/research/centre-future-democracy/>
2. Citizens Lab Resources: case studies and practical guides on how to get started with citizen engagement. <https://www.citizenlab.co/resources>
3. Civic Square: insights for visioning, building and investing in civic infrastructure for neighbourhoods of the future. <https://civicsquare.cc/>
4. DCent: a Europe-wide project developing the next generation of open source, distributed, and privacy-aware tools for direct democracy and economic empowerment. <https://dcentproject.eu/>
5. DCMS Innovation In Democracy Programme: tools on how to run a citizens' assembly and case studies from Involve, Democracy Society, My Society and RSA; Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2020. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/896502/liDP\\_handbook\\_-\\_How\\_to\\_run\\_a\\_citizen\\_assembly.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896502/liDP_handbook_-_How_to_run_a_citizen_assembly.pdf)
6. DEMOS, The Everyday Democracy Index: an index for measuring the lived experience of democracy in 25 European countries. Paul Skidmore and Kirsten Bound, 2008. [https://www.demos.co.uk/files/EDI\\_all%20chapters.pdf](https://www.demos.co.uk/files/EDI_all%20chapters.pdf)
7. Digital Social Innovation: a library of resources, toolkits and guides for Digital Social Innovation. <https://digitalsocial.eu/open-data-research-and-resources>
8. Engage Britain: organisation using participatory and deliberative methods to find solutions to the challenges facing Britain. <https://engagebritain.org/>
9. Flatpack Democracy 2.0: a national campaign to help communities reclaim their local councils. <https://www.flatpackdemocracy.co.uk/>
10. Graham Smith: publications from renowned academics in democratic theory and practice. <https://www.westminster.ac.uk/about-us/our-people/directory/smith-graham>
11. Involve, Building Back With: a handbook exploring how to involve communities in the COVID-19 response and recovery. <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base/building-back-how-do-we-involve-communities-covid-19-response-and-recovery>
12. Involve: a public participation charity providing resources, case studies and tools for how to put people at the heart of decision-making. <https://www.involve.org.uk/>
13. Jam and Justice: publications sharing learning about creating just cities. <https://jamandjustice-rjc.org/publications-jam-and-justice>

14. Koreo: UK Democracy Map, mapping organisations within the field in 2020. [https://docs.google.com/document/d/11Cs\\_8qbyozcUBNUKITtPvHZ96\\_j5tWo2W4KSFzKkLVE/edit?mc\\_cid=82d50af825&mc\\_eid=0ade4e51bd](https://docs.google.com/document/d/11Cs_8qbyozcUBNUKITtPvHZ96_j5tWo2W4KSFzKkLVE/edit?mc_cid=82d50af825&mc_eid=0ade4e51bd)
15. Networking for Democracy: A report analysing the needs of the democracy sector and presenting proposals for new networking efforts, Joe Mitchell for the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, 2020. <https://joedotmitchell.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/networking-for-democracy-full-report-joe-mitchell-august-2020.pdf>
16. Nesta, Collective Intelligence Design Playbook (beta): tools, tactics and methods to harness the power of people, data and technology to solve global challenges. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/toolkit/collective-intelligence-design-playbook/>
17. Nesta, Digital Democracy: tools for transforming political engagement, Julie Simon, Theo Bass, Victoria Boelman and Geoff Mulgan, Nesta, 2017. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/digital-democracy-the-tools-transforming-political-engagement/>
18. Newham Democracy and Civic Participation Commission: recommendations from the independent Commission into local democracy in Newham, 2020. <https://www.newhamdemocracycommission.org/>
19. OECD, Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave: report exploring trends in deliberative processes, analysing the trade-offs among different design choice, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en>.
20. Participedia: global network and crowdsourcing platform for researchers, educators, practitioners, policymakers, activists, and anyone interested in public participation and democratic innovations. <https://participedia.net/>
21. Rekindling Democracy: a guide for practitioners seeking to hone the way they interact in the citizen space, Cormac Russell, 2020. <https://www.nurtureddevelopment.org/rekindling-democracy/>
22. The Public Square: action research programme to understand how citizens can be more involved in making local decisions. <https://www.demsoc.org/>

## Acknowledgements

We'd like to say a big thank you to the Democracy Pioneers, who gave their time and energy not only in pursuing their projects and responding to a global pandemic, but also for discussing the bigger picture and context for democratic innovation. Our nineteen Pioneers included Be Buckfastleigh, Community Integrated Care, Democracy Club, Economy, Fife Council, Full Fact, Glasgow City Council, Highway Hope, Kirklees Council, mySociety, NewsWise (The Guardian Foundation), People's Powerhouse, Resistance Lab, Shout Out UK, Smart School Councils, TheatreState (Say Yes to Tess), The Parliament Project, User Voice and Women's Aid Federation. A big thank you particularly to Coryn Barclay, Pam Barrett, Matteo Bergamini, Simon Boddis, Louise Crow, Brendan Doyle, Joe Earle, Sam Evans, Ellie Fishleigh, Kim Foale, Alison Ford, Jessica Hailstone, John Hughes, Louisa Johnson, Joe Mitchell, Ali Norrish, Evelyn O'Donnell, Esther Oludipe, Kerry Pimblott, Angie Pitt, Annie Poland, Asha Pond, Ralitsa Raleva, Stephanie Riches, Michelle Ross, Greg Sanderson, Tess Seddon, Diana Sims, Hannah Stevens and Andrew Stokes.

Thanks go to our Democracy Pioneers judges for their time and insight: Kevin Davies, Chrystal Genesis, Sir Paul Grice, Tim Hughes, Dan Lawes, Stephanie Wong, Miriam Levin, Anthony Lilley, Peter Macfadyen and Kitty Von Bertele. We'd also like to thank all those who generously offered their time to participate in research activities including interviews and workshops held throughout 2020.

Finally, thank you to our colleagues who gave feedback on our ideas, including Raphael Leung, Isabel Newman, Greg Sanderson, Diane Sims and Laurie Smith.

## About the authors and contributors

### Authors:

Rosalyn Old  
Camilla Bertoncin  
Katherine Zscharnagk  
Carrie Deacon

### Contributors:

Khyati Modgil  
Kyle Usher

### Creative team:

Eva Oosterlaken  
Finn Strivens

## About Nesta

Nesta is an innovation foundation. For us, innovation means turning bold ideas into reality and changing lives for the better. We use our expertise, skills and funding in areas where there are big challenges facing society. Nesta is based in the UK and supported by a financial endowment. We work with partners around the globe to bring bold ideas to life to change the world for good.

[www.nesta.org.uk](http://www.nesta.org.uk)



58 Victoria Embankment  
London EC4Y 0DS  
+44 (0)20 7438 2500  
[information@nesta.org.uk](mailto:information@nesta.org.uk)

 [@nesta\\_uk](https://twitter.com/nesta_uk)

 [www.facebook.com/nesta.uk](https://www.facebook.com/nesta.uk)  
[www.nesta.org.uk](http://www.nesta.org.uk)

Nesta is a registered charity in England and Wales with company number 7706036 and charity number 1144091.

Registered as a charity in Scotland number SCO42833. Registered office: 58 Victoria Embankment, London, EC4Y 0DS.

