MANIFESTO

A BETTER DEMOCRATIC FUTURE IS POSSIBLE

01

From spectator sport to the right to participate

Democracy thrives only when we are all invited to help shape everyday solutions – not just at the ballot box. Citizens should no longer be kept on the margins of power, as spectators or consumers of politics. They must regain their right to take part, and society must recognise them as an invaluable resource.

Citizens are the driving force behind better solutions for our society, both in making decisions and in carrying them out. Good democracy grows out of our involvement in local communities, associations and workplaces – wherever we take responsibility and act.

Participation and active citizenship are about collective empowerment. They mean all of us playing our part in the democratic community and taking responsibility for ourselves, for one another and for society.

02

Represent and be represented

Genuine representation is the key to a better, more open democracy. We must create spaces where different experiences, ways of life and perspectives can be brought into play. This leads to better solutions and stronger legitimacy. Everyone must have the opportunity to help shape solutions that more of us can recognise ourselves in. At the same time, all of us must be prepared to step back at some point and make room for new voices.

Decisions improve when many different people and perspectives are involved, because no one can see an issue from every angle. Representation must be dynamic, open and based on continuous rotation, so that power does not become entrenched or captured by special interests. Far more of us must take our turn at representing others – not just at being represent-

03

Open democracy requires radical transparency

Democracy must create solutions that benefit as many people as possible. It must give everyone an equal opportunity to influence the decisions that shape their lives and the society they live in. Anything less is both unjust and destructive, breeding polarisation, instability and the abuse of power.

Equal access to decision-making is essential, to ensure that special interests and economic power do not take precedence over the needs of the community. We need direct democracy, radical transparency and clear checks on power. When decisions are made openly and the exercise of power can be traced, legitimacy and trust grow. Workplace democracy and employee representation on company boards counters the concentration of power. A robust democracy is built on decisions that serve the many rather than the few.

04

Good lives are driven by participation

Democracy must be the framework that allows everyone to take part freely in public dialogue. Freedom and equal rights are the precondition for a good and meaningful life. We want to reinvent the democratic ideal of public happiness for our time, by giving citizens a greater say in the society they share. Taking an active part in a community improves our quality of life, because it builds trust, commitment and a sense of security.

A vibrant democracy is one in which each generation can help take society in a direction it finds meaningful. It is about having hope and the space to live a dignified life – with communities that give each of us room to grow and to contribute. And we must be able to feel this close to home: in our neighbourhoods, at our workplaces and wherever we live our lives.

05

Democracy is something we train

Democracy is not something we simply have, but something we practise. Taking part in democracy requires muscles – in the form of skills and self-confidence. We are working to ensure that democratic participation once again becomes part of how we are educated and formed as citizens. A rich culture of everyday participation depends on training our ability to listen to one another, show empathy across our differences, disagree constructively and reach compromises. We must build the courage to fight and argue for a cause, and to mobilise others to help bring about change.

We must exercise our democratic muscles in every arena – in schools, in workplaces and in as many everyday settings as possible: from the committees of local associations to activist groups and community organisations.

06

Those who live with the solutions must own them

Citizens are the core of democracy – and its canaries in the coal mine. We react when decisions are made in oxygen-starved rooms, and when we are handled as an afterthought to solutions rather than engaged as a resource for good decisions. Those who must live with the consequences of decisions in their everyday lives must share ownership of them. That is a precondition.

We must see protest and resistance as healthy human reactions to unhealthy systems – systems that leave out the very people most affected. Far too often, we are brought in only at the end: when we adapt to climate change, site wind turbines, transform infrastructure or make changes in the workplace. We must always involve people from the outset, rather than holding consultations after the fact. Quite simply, solutions get better, legitimacy grows, and the power to implement them becomes so much greater.

07

Together we can do better

We believe in a participation-driven democracy, in which we ensure broad, deep and well-informed deliberation across society. This enables us to meet the challenges we face with the best solutions for everyone. When we let go of the idea that decisions are best left to a select few, and instead draw on our collective intelligence, we can overcome even the greatest challenges. This does not require moonshots. It requires the courage to bring everyday experts into close collaboration with professional ones.

We are working towards a future in which every citizen, at least once in their life, is invited to take part in an open deliberative process – locally, regionally or nationally – to find solutions on common ground. This requires those processes to have a real mandate to decide, resources that free up individual citizens to take part, and safeguards against special interests. In this way, we give more people the opportunity to create change for the common good.

08

Listen more closely and more widely

A viable democracy must be measured by its ability to engage every voice in finding solutions – including those who have no voice. The future, nature and the climate must be guaranteed a rightful place wherever decisions are made. Generations to come must be systematically taken into account through youth participation, and minorities must be actively encouraged to take part, so that voices without the same starting points or resources as the majority also count.

Direct democracy, rotation and stratified random selection are tools for bringing more voices into play, but we can do even more to ensure breadth in our decision-making. We must listen more closely to people who feel discriminated against, overlooked and shut out – in our communities, at work, in daily life and in politics. More people must gain a sense of belonging and be invited in, strengthening social cohesion and our shared solutions.

09

Local is the new global

The hyperlocal must be empowered. Whether in neighbourhoods, villages, workplaces, streets, blocks of flats or voluntary action groups, we must give people the freedom and the right to act in their everyday lives.

We must let go of the idea that we can hand over responsibility for welfare to the state alone, and responsibility for positive change to NGOs and associations. Democratic entrepreneurship and the will to act must grow from every corner of society and challenge the way we usually create solutions. Far too little will happen if we simply wait for those in charge.

The key to cohesion and social entrepreneurship lies at the local level. We must reform our society so that a new movement can rise freely from the grassroots, and we must devolve resources so that more people can take on responsibility themselves.

10

A better democratic future is possible

Democracy has never stood still. It has faced crises, each of which has opened the way to new answers and opportunities. Our task is to act in the knowledge that the future is open – and that a better democracy is created by drawing on our shared imagination. We must build a world founded on human rights and the liberal values of freedom, in which we protect both the unique, free individual and healthy communities.

Much of what is beautiful and meaningful around us springs from the human joy of creating and our ability to imagine. We need to put culture back at the heart of our society and let values be the foundation of our lives. When entrepreneurship and education – in the broadest sense – are combined with diligence and imagination, the combination often bears fruit. The result can be something we could not have imagined.

WE DO DEMOCRACY