

# GUIDELINES ON HOW TO IMPLEMENT FUTURE RANDOMLY SELECTED ASSEMBLIES AT TRANS- NATIONAL LEVEL

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a growing body of practical literature has emerged offering toolkits and guidelines on how to design and implement Citizens' Assemblies. These assemblies have become a cornerstone of democratic innovation, enabling randomly selected citizens to deliberate on complex issues and make collective recommendations. Yet, most of these assemblies remain defined by border realities, being these local, regional or national.

Nevertheless, the challenges societies face today are systemic and transnational: from the climate crisis to migration, digital governance, and economic inequality.

Despite this, there are still [few examples of Citizens' Assemblies](#) that transcend borders, or that interconnect them. Among these pioneering efforts are the [Global Citizens' Assembly](#) on the Climate and COP (2021) and the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#). However, the field

of transnational deliberation is yet an open space for experimentation.

The [Democratic Odyssey](#) is one such experiment and a first of its kind. It is an itinerant transnational assembly that travels from city to city across Europe, bringing together participants recruited locally and others joining across borders. This moving format introduces unique challenges: logistical coordination, linguistic diversity, cultural mediation, and, not least, the absence of a formal political mandate.

These guidelines draw directly from the lived experience of the Odyssey, not as a literal account of how it unfolded, but as a reflection on the lessons gleaned from our trials and missteps. They are written from the perspective of committed civil society actors who believe that democracy must evolve alongside the realities it seeks to govern, realities that are interconnected and global.

# **The Democratic Odyssey**

## **An Overview**

The Democratic Odyssey is a pioneering experiment in transnational citizen deliberation. Unlike traditional Citizens' Assemblies, which operate within a single city, region or country, the Odyssey is itinerant (would not be an Odyssey otherwise), moving across multiple European cities to bring together a diverse group of participants to deliberate on shared challenges. The assembly took place in Athens, Florence and Vienna throughout 2024-2025.

The assembly was designed to explore systemic, cross-border social and political challenges, from climate change and migration to European governance, by facilitating deliberation among citizens who normally would not share a common political or cultural space. Participants are recruited both locally, from the host city, and transnationally, drawing citizens from other cities and countries.

Key features of the Democratic Odyssey include:

### **1. Itinerant Structure**

Each assembly is hosted in a different city, adapting to the local context while maintaining continuity in deliberation themes and methodology.

### **2. Diverse participation**

Participants are randomly selected (sortition) to ensure demographic representativeness, while also taking into

account cross-border considerations such as nationality, language and socio-economic background. Civil Society organisations helped identify participants who might otherwise be underrepresented.

### **3. Logistical and cultural innovation**

Moving between cities introduces a range of challenges, including venue coordination, multilingual facilitation, translation and culturally sensitive engagement strategies.

### **4. Absence of formal political mandate**

Unlike most deliberative assemblies, the Odyssey does not operate under the authority of a government or political institution. Instead, it relies on the legitimacy of its own Consortium, the credibility of its methodology, and the public value of its deliberations.

### **5. Integration of artistic and civic practices**

The Odyssey combines deliberation with creative formats, performances, workshops and story-telling as a way to de-center traditional Western educational and deliberative models, valuing diverse modes of expression, knowledge and engagement.





*To keep exploring the field further, there are a number of practical toolkits, books and guides that provide both theoretical and practical insights:*

Title	Type of Text	Focus
<a href="#"><u>The Deliberative Democracy Handbook (Gastil &amp; Levine, 2005)</u></a>	Handbook	Foundations of deliberative theory and practice
<a href="#"><u>Open Democracy (Landemore, 2020)</u></a>	Book	The case for randomly selected assemblies as a core democratic institution
<a href="#"><u>Assembly guide from DemocracyNext</u></a>	Toolkit	Step-by-step practical guidance on designing and implementing assemblies
<a href="#"><u>OECD's Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions (2020)</u></a>	Report	Global overview of democratic innovations with case studies and evaluation methods



## WHAT IS A CITIZEN ASSEMBLY?

When we talk about Citizens' Assemblies, it is important to be clear about what we mean, but also to recognize that there are many ways of understanding what an assembly is. Different cultures and traditions have long practiced forms of collective decision-making, and what is now called deliberative democracy represents just one particular approach among many. Since these guidelines focus on transnational deliberative assemblies, we need to stay aware of the cultural and institutional 'conditioning' that shapes how these spaces are designed and understood.

**A Citizens' Assembly is a gathering of citizens who come together to deliberate and make decisions about issues that concern them.**

At its core, any assembly, whether spontaneous, protest-driven, or formally organised, embodies the principle of collective decision-making: people gathering to discuss, reflect and decide on shared concerns.

In their more structured deliberative form, Citizen's Assemblies bring together a group of people, selected by sortition (random selection), to discuss and make recommendations on a specific issue. Sortition, which distinguishes deliberative assemblies from other participatory formats, aims to ensure that those who participate mirror diversity of the broader population in terms of age, gender, education, geography, allowing the assembly to become a microcosm of society.

Rather than relying solely on elected officials, deliberative assemblies create inclusive spaces for all of us to learn about complex topics, exchange ideas and reason together before forming collective judgments.

This process, supported by facilitation and access to balanced information builds a methodology and infrastructure that allows for reflection, representativeness and accountability.





At the same time, it's important to recognise that the way Citizens' Assemblies have been formalised in recent decades is deeply influenced by Western traditions of deliberative democracy. These traditions tend to value rational debate and discursive ideals that prioritise argument, evidence, and consensus-building through reasoned dialogue. While this model has been influential in advancing participatory and representative innovations, it can also limit how we imagine assemblies, sidelining more embodied, relational, or ritualised forms of collective decision-making found in other cultural contexts. In this sense, even the idea of 'representation' that underpins these assemblies, typically understood through numbers and social categories, is shaped by a specific worldview, rather than being universal.



## **Los Cabildos Abiertos** **Assemblies from Below in Latin America**

Assemblies can be convivial tools as well, spaces where people learn to live, think and act together. An assembly is not merely a decision-making mechanism but a space to enable participants to exercise autonomy, mutual care and collective imagination.

The *cabildos abiertos*, are an example of that. They draw on a long Latin American tradition of popular assemblies, from indigenous community councils to neighborhood forums, where political participation is rooted in reciprocity and care.

This convivial dimension was vividly present during the Chilean *cabildos abiertos* of 2019, when citizens gathered spontaneously across the country to reflect on inequality and envision a new constitution. In neighborhood plazas, schools, and cultural centres, people of all ages sat in circles, shared food, listened to one another's experiences, and drafted collective proposals.

What mattered was not only the conclusions reached, but the act of coming together across differences. Assemblies are living laboratories of democracy: spaces where trust, empathy, and belonging are practiced as political acts.

## WHAT DOES TRANSNATIONALITY MEAN?

Transnationality in the context of deliberative Citizens' Assemblies involves bringing together citizens from multiple countries to deliberate on issues that are interwoven across contexts. It challenges the conventional assumptions embedded in many deliberative processes, which often reflect Western-centric, nation-bound notions of representation and rational debate.

In a transnational context, deliberation itself takes on new meanings: it becomes not only about exchanging arguments, but about navigating differences in language, experience, and worldviews, and learning how to build shared understanding across them.

Transnational assemblies add another layer of complexity. They bring together people who do not share the same language, culture, or political background, and whose understandings of participation or representation may differ widely. These differences are not obstacles but part of what makes transnational deliberation valuable: they reveal how democracy itself is lived and imagined differently across contexts.

Importantly, **transnationality is not a level but a scale**. It is not simply about zooming out to a global level, rather, it intertwines the local and the transnational in a rhizomatic manner, recognizing that people's identities, experiences, and concerns are shaped both by their immediate local contexts and by wider global dynamics.

Transnational assemblies must confront the reality that power, knowledge, and experience are unequally and unevenly distributed across borders. They must reckon with histories of colonialism, unequal access to resources and diverse political cultures, all of which shapes who participates, whose voices are heard, and how legitimacy is recognized. Central to this is the recognition of asymmetric

positionalities, the fact that people's lived experiences, for example their relationship to migration, vary profoundly depending on their social, historical and geopolitical contexts.

At their core, transnational assemblies still rest on the principles of collective deliberation and inclusive decision-making, yet, by the very nature of these assemblies, these principles must be rethought in practice. Representation cannot be assumed: demographic quotas alone cannot capture the lived experiences of people shaped by historical inequalities, migration or marginalization and its intersectionalities. The framing of issues, the language used, and the modes of engagement all carry implicit assumptions about what constitutes valid knowledge, rationality, and participation. Transnational assemblies are not neutral spaces; they are sites of epistemic negotiation, where diverse ways of knowing and expressing political judgment must coexist and be recognized on equal footing.



Transnational assemblies are experimental political laboratories, testing the limits of deliberative democracy while highlighting the colonial legacies and structural inequalities that conventional democracy obscures.

The potential of transnational assemblies lies precisely in this confrontation. By bringing people together across borders, they create spaces to negotiate differences, unlearn dominant assumptions, and cultivate collective understanding. Rather than merely scaling up citizen deliberation, transnational assemblies demand a rethinking of the very principles of participation, legitimacy and representation, showing how democracy can be both expanded and decolonized in a globally interconnected world.



## 10 PRINCIPLES FOR AN INCLUSIVE CITIZEN ASSEMBLY

While each deliberative Citizens' Assembly is shaped by its specific context, there is a growing consensus around a set of normative principles that can guide their design and evaluation. These principles outline the ethical, procedural and political foundations that any inclusive deliberative process should strive to uphold.

[The Citizens Takeover Europe coalition](#), a network of more than seventy civil society organisations, articulated [ten such principles](#) to assess the democratic quality of transnational assemblies in Europe. Inspired by those, the following principles offer a compass for ensuring that assemblies remain accessible, credible and transformative.

### 1. Participatory

A Citizens' Assembly should be co-designed and co-owned by its participants. EU citizens and residents, including notably young people, should have the opportunity to shape the Assembly at every step of its development, starting with the decisions on the design, scope and objectives of the Assembly, as well as the status of its public input into political decision-making.

### 2. Inclusive

Inclusion is not achieved merely through demographic representativeness. All participatory channels must be open to both EU citizens and EU residents. The citizens' assemblies should be composed by means of stratified random selection where possible, ensuring a balanced representation of people from different ages, genders, countries of residence, socio-economic backgrounds.. Inclusion also means removing structural barriers to participation (economic, linguistic, physical, digital and cultural). Assemblies must recognise how power and privilege shape who can speak and be heard. Sortition remains essential, but it must be complemented by outreach through

civil society networks to reach those often left out of political spaces: migrants, precarious workers, people with disabilities, and others at the margins.

### 3. Open

An inclusive Assembly must be open in both agenda and imagination, putting forward every possible proposal, with all options on the table, and without pre-emption of any of the outcomes of the discussion. Openness also means methodological flexibility to decide its own rules and proceedings and possible additional participatory instruments.

### 4. Deliberative

Deliberation goes beyond discussion; it is a process of mutual transformation. It requires safe, well-facilitated spaces where disagreement is possible and valued. Knowledge should be co-created through dialogue between citizens, experts, and facilitators. In transnational contexts, deliberation also

involves translation, not just of language, but of experience, emotion and worldview.

### 5. Transnational

The Assembly should maximise opportunities for interaction, deliberation and collaboration among people from different countries. Assemblies should seek to cultivate solidarity across differences, not homogenise perspectives. All participatory instruments should be transnational.

### 6. Transparent

Transparency builds trust. All official Assembly-related meetings and events should be livestreamed, recorded and made publicly available. All official Assembly-related documents should be made publicly available. But transparency also implies emotional and institutional honesty, acknowledging uncertainties, limitations, and the politics behind the process.

## **7. Accountable**

Assemblies must be accountable not only to funders or host institutions, but to the people who take part and the publics who observe. Organisers should commit to providing written feedback on how recommendations are received and acted upon. Accountability also means ethical responsibility: ensuring participants' well-being, respecting their time, and protecting them from tokenisation.

## **8. Effective**

Prior to the start of the Assembly, the organisers should commit themselves to following up on the resolutions to be adopted by the Assembly. The organisers should seek to draw public attention to the assembly happening. In addition to analogue communication, digital technologies should be used to multiply outreach. Where no formal mandate exists, as in the Democratic Odyssey, effectiveness can also mean catalysing networks, knowledge, and relationships that expand democratic capacity beyond the assembly itself.

## **9. Visible**

Visibility is crucial for legitimacy and learning. Assemblies should make themselves known to the broader public through accessible communication, storytelling, and creative documentation.

## **10. Attractive**

Assemblies should nurture a sense of joy and imagination. Democracy should be meaningful, affective and even festive. Integrating art, music, and storytelling invites collective creativity into political life.





## ON RECRUITMENT AND REPRESENTATION

Ensuring that a Citizens' Assembly genuinely reflects the communities it aims to serve is both a democratic imperative and a practical challenge. Sortition, also known as civic lottery, is foundational to this legitimacy: through random selection combined with demographic stratification, assemblies aim to create a 'mini-public', a small group mirroring the diversity of the larger population. The principle is straightforward but powerful: if the group reflects society in miniature, their collective decisions carry broader social weight.

However, in transnational contexts, defining this 'mini-public' becomes far more complex.

**When an assembly crosses borders, who exactly counts as 'the public'? How do we ensure representation of not only demographic diversity but also geopolitical, linguistic, and cultural differences?** Traditional sampling frames based on national census data no longer suffice, as they cannot capture the multiple societies and lived realities involved.

Therefore, transnational assemblies must move beyond statistical representativeness alone. They need to actively acknowledge historical inequalities related to mobility, citizenship rights, and access to participation. Sortition remains essential but alone is insufficient. Recruitment in this context is both a technical task and a deliberate act of inclusion.

Civil society organisations play a crucial role by connecting with communities often invisible to formal institutions, such as migrants, racialised minorities, and precarious citizens, ensuring their voices can be part of the assembly.

## Cross-border representativeness

Defining representativeness across borders is one of the greatest methodological and political challenges of a transnational assembly. Traditional approaches to sortition rely on a single national sampling frame, a population database from which participants are randomly selected and stratified according to variables such as age, gender, education or region. But when an assembly spans several countries, there is no shared registry (in some countries there is not even a registry), no common demographic baseline, and no single definition of who ‘the public’ is.

The question, then, is not how to select, but whom to represent. Should a transnational assembly mirror the population of Europe as a whole, or reflect the specific countries or communities involved? These choices are not neutral, they reveal the political vision underpinning the assembly and its understanding of belonging.

Moreover, the very idea of “Europe” is contested: geographically,

culturally, and politically. Assemblies must navigate questions about including non-EU countries, diasporas, and transnational communities that challenge formal EU boundaries.

### **How the assembly defines its European scope directly affects its representativeness and legitimacy.**

In practice, constructing a sampling frame across borders requires both creativity and collaboration, particularly in transnational assemblies that operate without a governmental mandate. In such cases, access to national population registries is rarely guaranteed, making institutional partnerships essential yet often difficult to secure. Recruitment relies on assembling data from diverse national or regional sources and, crucially, on working with civil society networks capable of reaching those who exist beyond formal records: mobile citizens, refugees, people without stable residency, or those

excluded from official statistics for administrative or political reasons. Stratification criteria should not stop at the usual demographic variables but also reflect deeper social and political cleavages, urban and rural contexts, linguistic and cultural communities, differing relationships to European institutions, and varied experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

Language is central to participation. Multilingualism requires robust interpretation and translation services, as well as culturally sensitive communication strategies that go beyond literal translation. Supporting different modes of expression, storytelling, visual methods, or nonverbal communication, helps ensure all participants can engage meaningfully, regardless of linguistic background or literacy levels.

Moreover, cross-border representativeness demands an awareness of epistemic diversity, recognising that different life experiences, histories, and perspectives bring essential forms of knowledge to collective imagination. Designing a transnational assembly is a democratic negotiation in itself: about who gets to be seen, who gets to speak, and who gets to define what ‘Europe’s public’ means.

## **Beyond institutional representation**

In Europe, representation already takes multiple forms. The European Union embodies different logics of representativity: the Council of the EU represents national governments, the European Parliament represents citizens who can vote, and the European Commission claims to represent the common European interest. Each of these forms of representation is both partial and limited, constrained by who is entitled to vote, by national borders, and by the institutional imagination of what “Europe” is and who belongs within it.

Moreover, the nation-state itself acts as a fundamental and multifaceted limit to representation. Beyond merely defining formal political and administrative boundaries that determine who is counted or who has



voting rights, the nation-state shapes how people's identities, loyalties, and political imaginaries are constructed. It imposes borders that not only exclude those lacking citizenship or residency but also delimit the frameworks through which belonging and participation are understood. These borders create formal limits, excluding migrants, refugees, stateless people, and mobile populations from full political membership. But they also produce informal and symbolic limits by embedding assumptions about national identity, language, and culture that influence who is recognized as a legitimate political actor. The nation-state's logic often prioritizes certain narratives, histories, and experiences while marginalizing others, reinforcing hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion.

From this perspective, representation is not a fixed structure but a rhizomatic practice, it grows through overlapping and sometimes competing logics of legitimacy. Yet many people fall through the cracks of these systems: migrants without voting

rights, precarious or mobile citizens, and those whose realities are not visible in formal processes.

**A transnational citizens' assembly has the potential, therefore, to operate with a different concept of representation, by enhancing the democratic landscape of Europe.**

By bringing together people who are usually absent from formal channels, it extends the horizon of who is seen, heard, and counted. It gives presence to those silenced by the limits of current representative structures and, in doing so, it tests what "European representation" could mean if grounded in lived experience rather than formal citizenship. This deep diversity of political histories, migration experiences, and social realities enriches deliberation. It encourages participants to question their own assumptions, to see Europe from multiple vantage points, and to recognise that democracy must be imagined from the margins as much as from the centre.

## **Case Example: Partnering with Civil Society to reach refugees. The Democratic Odyssey & MetaDrasi (Greece)**

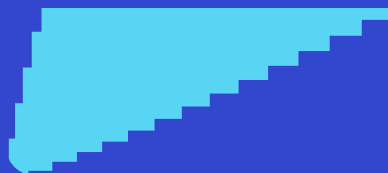
Because the Democratic Odyssey wanted everyone affected by collective decisions to have a voice, it was crucial to reach refugees and people with lived experiences of displacement. In Athens, access to this community was not straightforward, as traditional sampling methods and registries do not include refugees.

To bridge this gap, the Democratic Odyssey partnered with MetaDrasi - Action for Migration and Development, an organisation providing education and language courses for refugees in Greece. Through this collaboration, MetaDrasi reached out to its network to share information about the Assembly and invite participation.

Thanks to them, 60 refugees applied, and 20 were selected to take part in the Assembly to whom we provided a stipend to recognise their time and contribution.

Democracy can't stop at the border of citizenship. When we work with organisations rooted in local communities, participation becomes more real, more inclusive, and closer to the world we want to build.

See: Composition, who is who in the Democratic Odyssey?



# Transnational Assemblies and Deep Diversity

In the Democratic Odyssey assembly in Florence, an Italian and a Ukrainian participant talked about migration from very different experiences.

The Italian shared how migration affects their community. People often leave to find work elsewhere, and immigrants come looking for jobs. For them, migration is about the economy and changes in their town.

The Ukrainian had recently fled war and talked about migration as a fight for safety and a new start. They spoke about the difficulties of leaving home and living in a new country.

As they listened to each other, the Italian began to understand migration as more than just money or jobs, it's also about people's struggles and hopes. The Ukrainian saw that migration is connected to many reasons and affects many communities in different ways.





**Based on these reflections, we propose the following guiding principles for recruitment and representation in transnational citizens' assemblies:**

**Principle 1. Go beyond demographic sortition.**

Random selection is the foundation of legitimacy, but inclusivity requires more than demographic representativeness. Recruitment should also consider participants' motivation, access to technology, and lived experiences relevant to the issues discussed. Recruitment should use sortition combined with deliberate inclusion efforts to ensure diverse representation beyond demographic quotas.

**Principle 2. Engage civil society as connectors.**

Civil society organisations can bridge trust gaps and help reach underrepresented communities, especially across borders. Their involvement must, however, remain facilitative rather than selective, to safeguard the integrity of the random process.

**Principle 3. Design for cross-border representativeness.**

Defining a sampling frame that spans multiple countries is a methodological challenge. Sampling frameworks must incorporate multiple demographic, cultural, linguistic, and political variables, recognizing the limitations of national datasets.

**Principle 4. Remove practical barriers to participation.**

Inclusivity goes beyond recruitment and representation, it also requires addressing the practical and logistical obstacles that can prevent people from taking part. This includes providing translation and interpretation for all languages spoken, stipends or financial support to cover travel, accommodation or lost income, childcare or family support, and visa or travel assistance for participants crossing borders.

## ON FACILITATION AND DELIBERATION

Once participants are at the table, the quality of their engagement depends on how the assembly is facilitated and how deliberation is structured. In transnational assemblies, facilitation requires much greater effort and sensitivity than in national or local settings. It is not just about guiding conversation, it is about navigating linguistic, cultural and epistemic diversity, creating a space where everyone can contribute meaningfully despite vast differences. Even when participants are selected to be representative, facilitation is essential to level the playing field, ensuring that historically marginalised, divergent or minority voices are not drowned out.

**Good facilitation directly shapes the quality of deliberation, the legitimacy of the assembly and the trust participants place in the process.** Facilitators are there to enable collective intelligence, not to impose their own ideas. They must remain neutral toward the content of the discussion and cannot steer the conversation toward a particular outcome. At the same time, they cannot simply listen to the strongest voices; their role is to ensure that marginalised or divergent perspectives are heard and can co-exist alongside dominant ones.

In international settings, facilitation is deeply shaped by cultural differences. While rational debate is often privileged because it is the system's established mode, it is not the language that matters. Facilitators must be attentive to different political cultures, communication norms, and prior experiences with deliberation. Effective facilitation also involves attending to emotions, storytelling, body language, and alternative forms of expression, recognising that participants communicate and understand the world in many different ways.

Transnational assemblies are experimental spaces, where the very assumptions of deliberative democracy are tested. Facilitation methods should be flexible, iterative and reflective, continuously adapted to the context and the participants to foster truly inclusive, just and meaningful deliberation.

### **Principle 1. Navigate Linguistic and Cultural Diversity**

Without translation, interpretation, and intercultural facilitation, participation is limited and inequitable. Language and culture shape who can speak and be heard. But translation goes beyond converting words from one language to another: it also involves translating meanings, cultural references, assumptions, and norms so that participants from different backgrounds can fully understand and engage with the discussion.

### **Principle 2. Attend to cross-border power and historical inequalities**

Citizens from different countries experience vastly different levels

of privilege, mobility, and political and social recognition. Women, racialised minorities, refugees, and other marginalised groups are often disproportionately affected by these inequalities. They may face structural barriers to participation, including lower economic resources, limited access to information, social exclusion, or lack of recognition by formal institutions. Even when included in a transnational assembly, these participants can be overshadowed by more privileged voices if facilitation does not intentionally level the playing field. Facilitators must actively mediate these asymmetries.

### **Principle 3. Recognise multiple ways of knowing**

Rational debate alone privileges Western-centric norms.

Storytelling, embodied knowledge, and artistic methods are essential to include diverse epistemologies.

### **Principle 4. Enable collective intelligence and Inclusion of Divergent Voices**

Once participants are at the table, the quality of deliberation depends



on the dynamics of interaction. Facilitators must create a space where all voices, especially minorities, dissenting, historically silenced perspectives, can be expressed, heard and considered alongside dominant ones. The goal is to harness the collective intelligence of the group, ensuring that diversity of perspective translates into richer, more legitimate deliberation outcomes.

### **Principle 5. Promote digital and hybrid inclusion**

Cross-border assemblies often rely on virtual participation. Ensuring fair access to digital tools and mitigating technological inequality is critical.

### **Principle 6. Reflect and Adapt Continuously**

The experimental nature of transnational assemblies demands flexibility. Facilitators must continuously adjust methods to context, participants, and emerging group dynamics.



# Civic Arts: Connecting Beyond Words with Playback Theatre

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## ON GOVERNANCE AND MANDATE

One of the central challenges of transnational assemblies is not that they inherently lack a mandate, but rather that existing institutions often do not grant them a clear formal mandate. Unlike national, regional or local citizens' assemblies, which are often convened by governments or public bodies with a defined policy pathway, transnational assemblies operate in a more ambiguous political space. Their recommendations may carry moral or symbolic weight, but their direct political impact is uncertain and depends heavily on voluntary uptake by governments, international institutions, or civil society actors.

Existing examples, such as the Global Climate Assembly, highlight the limits and possibilities of influence in these contexts. While such assemblies can generate high-quality deliberations and bring diverse perspectives to the table, the translation of their outputs into binding policy or actionable change is contingent on external actors' willingness to engage. This raises critical questions about legitimacy, accountability and public trust: if participants devote time and effort but see no concrete effect, engagement and confidence in the process can be undermined.

**Crucially, the assembly itself is not just a deliberative body but a form of mobilisation, a collective movement and an exercise in advocacy.** The political power of transnational assemblies often resides in the mobilisation and continued engagement of their members beyond the formal sessions.

At the same time, the absence of a formal mandate can also be liberating. Without institutional constraints, transnational assemblies have the freedom to explore innovative deliberative methods, raise unconventional proposals, and include voices typically excluded from formal political arenas. They can act as experimental spaces for

democracy itself, testing what it means to deliberate across borders, cultures and ways of understanding the world.

How to navigate this tension? Balancing aspirational influence and experimental autonomy while critically reflecting on the pathways through which their recommendations might reach political decision-makers? Clear communication with participants about these limitations is essential to uphold legitimacy and sustain trust.

Furthermore, transnational assemblies highlight the need for a political system that is porous and responsive across borders, rather than concentrated in a few political hubs like Brussels. By bringing citizens from different countries into dialogue, these assemblies reveal how decision-making structures often fail to capture diversity of experiences, needs and knowledge that exist across Europe.

**They make visible the disconnect between where power is formally exercised and where the people actually live and experience the consequences of specific policies.**

Transnational assemblies act as diagnostic tools. They show the limitations of current political architectures and suggest that truly transnational challenges (climate, migration, digital governance) require forms of democratic engagement that travel with the people, rather than waiting for them to reach institutional centers.

This dynamic applies across all types of transnational assemblies, where governance must transcend traditional hierarchical models and instead function as a distributed collective consciousness. This governance is not about top-down control but a shared, evolving sense of responsibility and care among participants, fostering ongoing collaboration that respects diversity and transcends borders. It is a living, adaptive process reflecting the plural, cross-border nature of the assembly and the movement it inspires.

### **Principle 1. Define a Clear but flexible mandate**

Transnational assemblies must clarify their purpose, scope, and intended influence. While they may not have formal authority, participants need to understand what the assembly can achieve, how recommendations are communicated, and the potential pathways for uptake across different countries. Flexibility is key: the mandate should evolve in response to contextual realities and learning during the assembly.

### **Principle 2. Trans-local Governance**

Governance should be distributed rather than centralised, reflecting the cross-border nature of transnational assemblies.

### **Principle 3. Radical transparency**

When there is no government or institutional authority backing the assembly, participants and observers must be able to see how decisions are made, who is involved, and how resources are used. Transparency signals fairness, prevents perceptions of hidden agendas, and allows stakeholders from multiple countries to engage confidently with the process.

### **Principle 4. Plan for follow-up and integration into broader democratic ecosystems**

Even without formal authority, transnational assemblies should design clear follow-up mechanisms, including monitoring, reporting, and maintaining dialogue with participants and stakeholders. Assemblies should situate themselves within a wider ecosystem of democratic initiatives, fostering connections, learning, and synergies with other citizen-led or institutional processes.



# Political empowerment through participation

Transnational assemblies do more than generate recommendations, they create political consciousness and empowerment among participants, even when there is no formal political mandate.



When signora Aurora arrived at the Florence assembly of the Democratic Odyssey, she was uncertain why she had been invited. She doubted that her voice mattered and felt she had nothing to contribute. Aurora began to realise, through the course of the assembly, that her experiences, opinions and ideas were valuable. She discovered that she could be heard, and together with others build collective thinking. Aurora left the assembly transformed: she believed that not only she was part of the political system but that she could contribute to its change.

Transnational assemblies expand the notion of political agency beyond formal institutions, empowering individuals to see themselves as active participants in shaping society. Assemblies cultivate citizenship, confidence, and collective responsibility, sowing the seeds for broader civic engagement across borders.

## LOGISTICAL AND OPERATIONAL ASPECTS

Transnational assemblies present unique logistical and operational challenges. Unlike national or local assemblies, they must navigate cross-border coordination, diverse infrastructures, and multiple cultural and social contexts. Organising such an assembly requires extraordinary creativity and adaptability from the team. Budgets are often limited, making it essential to build partnerships at every level (hotels, catering services, venues, local transport) as well as with civil society actors who can support on the ground. **Beyond logistics, the team must center care and empathy. Intersectional awareness is critical: participants may face varying levels of privilege, mobility, language fluency and accessibility needs.**

In the Democratic Odyssey, with its itinerant nature, we experienced this first-hand. Our venues ranged from the historic Pnyx in Athens to Palazzo Vecchio in Florence and the FH university in Vienna. Each space brought its own challenges and opportunities, requiring delicate negotiations, cross-border coordination, and a network of contacts who understood and believed in the purpose of the assembly. Logistical planning is not just operational, it is deeply relational, relying on human connections, trust, and a shared commitment to making participation possible for all.

### Principle 1. Strategic hosting and rotation

A transnational assembly that moves across countries embodies the very idea of shared ownership and distributed democracy. Its rotation allows different territories and communities to host, interpret, and reshape the process according to their contexts. Yet rotation can only be meaningful when it is anchored in strong local partnerships, with civic actors, public institutions, and communities who hold relational and logistical knowledge. This grounding gives continuity, legitimacy, and care to a process that otherwise risks becoming detached from place.

## **Principle 2. Accessibility for all**

Accessibility must be central to all planning. This includes physical accessibility of venues, provision of translation and interpretation services, digital access for remote participants, and accommodations for participants with caregiving responsibilities, disabilities, or other specific needs.

## **Principle 3. Intersectional care**

Operational design must begin from the recognition that participants inhabit unequal worlds. To make participation truly equitable, assemblies must build support systems, material, linguistic and emotional, that respond to these asymmetries. Empathy is not a soft skill but a structural principle: it means designing logistics, schedules, and modes of interaction that acknowledge vulnerability and difference as part of the political fabric, not as exceptions to be managed.

## **Principle 4. Relational and collaborative planning**

Logistics are deeply relational. Build strong networks of local partners, civil society organisations and cross-border contacts to facilitate

trust, collaboration and shared commitment.

## **Principle 5. Budget creativity and resourcefulness**

Transnational assemblies often operate without the financial security of institutional backing, which makes creativity and solidarity central to their survival. Budgeting becomes a political act, one that reflects values of equity, care and collective responsibility rather than efficiency or profit. Resourcefulness means recognising that money is not the only currency: partnerships, trust, and shared purpose are also forms of capital. Collaborating with local organisations, municipalities, and civil society networks can unlock infrastructures of hospitality and care, spaces, volunteers, interpreters, or meals, that would otherwise be inaccessible.

## **Principle 6. Hybrid participation and digital inclusion**

Transnational assemblies operate across vast distances, which makes hybrid participation not only a logistical solution but a democratic one. Blended physical and virtual formats allow more people to take part, follow the discussions,

and witness the process, extending the assembly's reach beyond those physically present. Facilitators and organisers must actively bridge the gap between in-person and online participants, creating moments of interaction and shared ownership.

*The table below provides an indicative overview of key budget categories unique to transnational assemblies:*

Budget category	Description	Notes
Accommodation & Travel	Travel and lodging for participants and team, including cross-border transport, visas, and travel insurance.	Essential to cover visa support and travel assistance for participants from less privileged contexts.
Multilingual Translation & Interpretation	Simultaneous interpretation (in-person and online), document translation, captioning, and multilingual materials.	Crucial for inclusion and equal participation; requires experienced interpreters for multiple languages.
Technology & Hybrid Participation	Digital platforms, livestreaming, video conferencing licenses, IT support, hardware for virtual participation.	Ensures seamless integration of in-person and online participants, including accessibility features.
Communication & Outreach	Multilingual outreach campaigns, recruitment, informational materials, and social media management.	Essential for reaching diverse and hard-to-reach communities across borders.
Catering & Meals	Food and refreshments considering diverse dietary needs.	Include culturally sensitive options and support for virtual participants (e.g., meal vouchers).



# The Citizen Charter: Blending Onsite and Online deliberation

During the final stage of the Democratic Odyssey in Vienna, participants worked collectively to draft what became known as the Citizen Charter, a text that distilled months of discussions, reflections, and encounters across borders. But this process did not happen only within the walls of the assembly.

While participants deliberated in person, online participants were following the sessions live and engaging through the Democratic Odyssey platform. In real time, they

could read, comment, and suggest additions to the evolving text. This exercise required a strong logistical coordination by the organising team.



This experiment in hybrid deliberation blurred the boundaries between physical and digital spaces, showing that transnational assemblies can nurture democratic participation across multiple layers of presence. The Citizen Charter was not the product of a single room, but of a distributed community.

## COMMUNICATION, COMMUNITY AND OUTREACH

In every democratic experiment, communication and media play a decisive role, yet too often, they remain the eternal forgotten. While citizen assemblies are still far from being an established democratic practice, their innovative nature makes them a powerful expression of renewal within the political system. But renewal cannot happen in silence. Because they are innovative, they are yet not fully known, and it is also necessary to turn them into a movement. We need people to talk about them, to feel it belongs to them, to see themselves reflected in them.

This is even more vital when it comes to transnational assemblies, where participation crosses linguistic, cultural and political boundaries. These assemblies rarely have the institutional backing, infrastructure, or communication budgets that national or local assemblies might enjoy. They operate in the interstices of existing systems, and precisely for that reason, they must invest in building a living community around them.

Communication, community and outreach are the connective tissue that allows democratic experiments to take root and resonate. Without visibility and shared narratives, assemblies risk remaining isolated exercises.

### Principle 1. Narrative Framing

How we communicate the process matters as much as the process itself. Assemblies should not be presented as isolated experiments but as part of a larger story of democratic renewal. Narrative framing helps situate the assembly within a shared political and social context.

### Principle 2. Media and transparency

Visibility is a democratic principle. Livestreams, photographs, open documentation, and accessible archives ensure that assemblies are not closed spaces but public ones.

### **Principle 3. Feedback Channels**

Communication should be two-way. Assemblies gain depth and relevance when the broader public has ways to interact with them by commenting, proposing, or following up through digital platforms, meetings, or social media.

### **Principle 4. Building a Transnational Community**

Transnational assemblies require more than coordination, they need community. Communication and outreach should nurture spaces where participants, facilitators and observers remain in dialogue across borders.

### **Principle 5. Continuity**

Communication strategies must be long-term, linking phases of learning, deliberation and reflection.

## **The Democratic Odyssey Platform**

The Democratic Odyssey platform is at the heart of sustaining transnational engagement. Designed to be more than a tool, the Odyssey platform is a living civic space. Inspired by the Decidim model, the platform allows participants, observers, and the wider public to interact with the assembly process in multiple languages, breaking down barriers of geography, culture and accessibility.

# The Festivals

## Anchoring Assemblies in Local Contexts and Expanding Participation

Within the Democratic Odyssey journey, in each assembly we created festivals with unique themes to both anchor the events in their local context and engage people who were not directly participating in the assemblies. We opened doors not only for deliberation but for celebration. These were moments where art, performance, and civic imagination intertwined, inviting everyone to step into the world of democratic experimentation.

In **Florence** we organised ‘the village for civic action’, featuring a documentary, talks, performances, and spaces for organizations working with young people and democracy to engage the public. The festival became a hub for interaction and reflection, connecting assembly participants with broader civic actors.

In **Vienna**, in partnership with Festwochen, we imagined ‘Democracy as an Act of love’, a festival of games and encounters with social movements. It celebrated the many experiments across the city that seek to transform political life, reminding everyone that democracy is also joy, imagination and care.

Through these festivals, outreach becomes embodied and visible. They are our way of creating spaces where citizens can touch, feel, and participate in democracy. Assemblies must build community and open the possibilities of democratic innovation to everyone.



# **GUIDELINES ON HOW TO IMPLEMENT FUTURE RANDOMLY SELECTED ASSEMBLIES AT TRANS- NATIONAL LEVEL**



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