Democratic Odyssey Repository of Training Materials

Introduction

This repository compiles the core training materials used throughout the *Democratic Odyssey*, a crowdsourced campaign advocating for the creation of a Permanent People's Assembly for Europe.

As part of this journey, the Deliberation Academy was established to support and empower citizens in engaging meaningfully in democratic deliberation. Over the course of several assemblies (September 2024 to May 2025) – both in-person and online – a diverse range of training modules were developed and applied. These materials were used to strengthen deliberative skills, raise awareness about power and inclusion, and support collective decision-making practices.

This repository is offered as a resource for those who wish to continue this work. It is both a record of what was achieved during the Odyssey and an invitation to others to carry these practices forward in the pursuit of a more participatory and resilient democracy,

Structure of the Repository

Each section of this repository is organised thematically as a modular training block. Modules are structured with guidance on timing, facilitation techniques, and tips for in-person or online implementation. Scenarios, discussion prompts, and reflective tools are provided throughout, allowing flexible application across settings.

Methodological Training Toolbox used during the Democratic Odyssey Assembly

A. Active Listening & Empathy Module

This module was used across all three Assemblies, Athens (27-29 September 2025), Florence (21-23 February 2025), and Vienna (23-25 May 2025), to lay the groundwork for mutual understanding. Partner active listening was integrated into the early sessions in each Assembly, offering participants a structured moment to connect across differences. The exercise supported building a foundation of trust by enabling each person to share a personal story and be deeply heard.

In Athens, this practice of listening took a creative form through the *Sail Tapestry*. Participants gathered in groups of around fifteen, and sat around large sheets of paper designed as sails for our common ship. Each person first expresses what the assembly meant to them and how democratic practices could help Europe weather future storms.

Listening attentively to one another's contributions, the groups then wove these diverse expressions into a single collective motto that they draw at the center of their sail. This process turned listening into a visible act: noticing not only what each individual brought, but also how different voices could be combined into a shared vision.

Timing	What	Tips & Methods
10 - 15	**Present: What is active listening** ● Attentive silence ● Reflecting and paraphrasing ● Withholding judgment ● Validating emotions ● Not interrupting or shifting focus	Use visual aid (power point presentation or flipchart in the space. Use examples with embodied practice for participants to understand.
20 - 25	**Partner Active Listening Exercise: 10 min** ● In pairs, Partner A speaks for 3 minutes about a real issue they care about. Prompt suggestion: Share a moment that you experienced or saw political injustice. ● Partner B listens silently — no interrupting, reacting, or giving advice. Just listening to understand with the heart.	Make sure that partners can sit comfortably without distraction. If the exercise is online, make sure you give the groups enough space in the breakout room.

	● Partner B can then mirror/ paraphrase what they heard. ● Switch Roles Debrief in pairs or groups of 4: 10 - 15 min ● What did it feel like to be listened to without interruption? ● What was challenging about just listening? ● What did you notice in your body or emotions?	
20 - 25	**Three Level Listening** **Introduce the model: 5 min** ● Level 1: Internal — focusing on your own thoughts ("What will I say next?") ● Level 2: Focused — fully present with the speaker ● Level 3: Global — noticing mood, energy, non-verbal cues **Pair Exercise: 15 min total including note-taking** Partner A: shares for 6 min, every two minutes the facilitator asks the listener to be in a different level of listening. After one round the listener takes notes of their experience. 2 min Switch. **Debrief: 5 min** ● How was it to listen on the different levels	Visualise the model and stick closely to timekeeping. Make sure participants have their note-taking material prepared for the journaling exercises after each section.
25-50	**Citizen's Assembly Roleplay** This simulation is particularly useful for groups that will afterwards engage together in deliberation at an assembly. It can include methods from the theatre of the oppressed to stage the scenario or just unfold in an improvised way. Roles: 1. **Roles – 2-5 people** (self-define role if not given) 2. **Listener** (practices active listening) 3. **Observer** (observes and comments on the process; does not actively take part in the exercise. **Scenario Cards**	

- **Role Play:** Act out the scenario and invite others to step in and shift the dynamic.
- **Freeze Frame:** Pause a moment of power imbalance and ask: "What could someone do now?"
- **Group Analysis:** In small groups, identify the types of power and propose interventions. People can also use the Freeze Frame to first describe what they see before going into a deeper analysis.
- **Reflection:** Ask participants to write about a time they experienced or witnessed a similar dynamic.

Scenario 1: The Expert Overshadows the Assembly

Context: During a citizens' assembly session on environmental policy, a guest expert is invited to present. After their talk, they remain in the room and continue responding to participants' questions, taking up more than 50% of the discussion time.

Questions:

- Who holds visible power? Who holds invisible power?
- How might this affect participants' sense of agency?
- What could the facilitator or participants do to shift the balance?

Scenario 2: The Language Barrier

Context: One participant requires interpretation support. The group moves quickly through a deliberation process with complex vocabulary. The interpreter struggles to keep up, and the participant speaks less and less over time.

Questions:

- How is power related to language in this case?
- What are inclusive ways to pace or adapt the process?
- How can the group share responsibility for language justice?

Scenario 3: The Quiet Voice

Context: A young participant from a working-class background regularly shares thoughtful points but is often interrupted or ignored. More assertive participants dominate the airtime.

Questions:

- What hidden norms about confidence or speaking styles are at play?
- How might facilitation or group agreements intervene?How can power be redistributed in real-time?

Scenario 4: Who Sets the Agenda?

Context: A facilitator pre-prepares the agenda and discussion topics based on institutional priorities. A few participants want to add urgent local concerns, but are

	told there's no time.

Questions:

- Who has agenda-setting power here?
- What are the risks of excluding bottom-up input?
- How might co-creation be introduced into the agenda-setting?

Scenario 5: The "Neutral" Facilitator

Context: A facilitator tries to remain neutral during a heated conversation about migrant rights. When a participant makes a harmful generalization, the facilitator doesn't intervene, aiming to avoid "taking sides."

Questions:

- What kind of power does the facilitator hold here?
- What are the limits of neutrality in power-sensitive issues?
- How can facilitators act with integrity and inclusion?

Scenario 6: The Missing Voices

Context: Despite outreach, a citizens' assembly has no disabled participants and only one racialized member. The facilitators acknowledge this but continue as planned.

Questions:

- How is power shaped by who is absent?
- What can be done mid-process to address exclusion?
- How do we make processes more structurally inclusive? | |
| 10 | **Overall Debrief on Active Listening**

Use the time to check out in the group on overall take aways from active listening practice. | |

B. Decision Making Module: Developing and practising decision making with different techniques

This was the most used module across all three Assemblies, Athens, Florence, and Vienna, because participants were regularly tasked with navigating complex decisions. Its design allowed for flexible application depending on the stage and objective of the Assembly. In Florence, the module was key to supporting deliberations about trade-offs between different policy solutions, often requiring them to weigh values such as environmental

sustainability, economic viability, and social justice. In Athens, it helped participants debate broad themes and orientations, while in Vienna, it guided the fine-tuning and ultimate endorsement of the Citizen Charter. Its adaptability to different phases of the deliberative process and its emphasis on inclusive, transparent and structured collective decision-making made it indispensable throughout the Democratic Odyssey journey.

Timing	What	Tips & Methods
10	Welcome and Grounding Exercise	
10	**Establishing Group Agreements – Brave Space Framework** Before engaging in decision-making exercises, participants are invited to co-create a "brave space," a framework designed to support honest, courageous, and inclusive dialogue. Originating from *Courageous Conversations About Race* (Singleton & Hays, 2008), a brave space encourages participants to engage with both comfort and challenge, honour diverse identities and lived experiences, and remain present in moments of disagreement or discomfort. Key principles include *No Attacks* (avoiding intentional harm), *Solidarity* (fostering care and recognition of each other's humanity), *Embrace Complexity* (acknowledging nuance beyond binary thinking), *Controversy with Respect* (constructive engagement with differing opinions), *Listen to Understand* (active listening to grasp others' perspectives), *Owning Intentions and Impacts* (acknowledging the effects of one's actions), and *Challenge by Choice* (deciding individually how much to engage in challenging dialogue). These guiding commitments provide a shared foundation for respectful interaction and collective learning, enabling participants to approach complex decision-making processes with curiosity, care, and mutual accountability.	
10 + 20	**Present the models of decision making** ● Share them briefly in the plenary to make sure everyone understands (10 min max and then (approximately for 20 min) 　○ Put them down on flipcharts and have people do a gallery walk to explore them by writing their own experiences or initial comments on the flipcharts. 　○ Have small group interactions about the different models. 　　■ Who is empowered to decide? 　　■ What happens with disagreement? 　　■ Is neutrality possible? 　○ Have groups self-select models that resonate with them and prepare	

short interventions about the benefits and the downsides.

Model	Description	When It's Useful
Assessing the room (temperature checks, thumbs up etc.)	Getting a sense of the decision temperature in the room	
Consensus	All participants must agree or "live with" a decision	For trust-building, shared ownership, full group agreement
Consent (Sociocracy)	Decisions move forward unless there's a reasoned objection: Good enough to try for now.	For efficient yet inclusive groups
Majority Vote	50% +1 wins	For clear-cut choices, time-limited contexts
Supermajority	66% or 75% threshold	For structural or constitutional changes
Random Selection (Sortition)	Used for fairness in deliberative sampling. Sortition based decision making only includes some people in the final decision, could be through a representative council or body.	In representative selection. Let's
Deliberative Polling	Combines deliberation with survey-style feedback	To measure informed opinion shifts

Deeper Reflection on Models of Decision Making.

Further understanding Decision Making Models: Can be used to reflect on citizen's own experience or actively used in the actual training to understand how decisions are made. This is especially relevant as citizens are stepping out of a general context in which they make decisions in their everyday life and into a context where democratic deliberation is practises.

World Cafe Format: Set up different tables with questions around decision making. People can walk (either formally through a shared timer or in their own time around the tables to add their content to the tables).

- Inclusion:
  - Who's at the table?
  - How can we create more inclusive assemblies?
- Legitimacy:
  - Will the public accept the decision?
  - How do we make sure that the deliberation is legitimate to decision makers?

60 min

- Transparency:
  - How are citizens going to receive transparent and complex information about the topic at hand?
  - How clear is the process?
- Equity:
  - Are marginalized voices protected?
  - How does the organisational structure and facilitation ensure that equity is at the center of the deliberation
- Efficiency:
  - Amidst the focus on equity and inclusion, how can we also speed up the decision making processes if necessary?
  - Do we need to act quickly?

C. Deliberation Module: Practising Deliberation Techniques

This module was central to building participants' practical deliberation skills through immersive, hands-on experience. Facilitators introduced various deliberation formats across the different assembly moments, with particular emphasis on World Café and Fishbowl methods, which were actively employed. These formats encouraged inclusive participation by creating spaces for small-group conversations (World Café) and deep, focused listening within rotating discussion circles (Fishbowls).

Timing	What
10	Welcome and Grounding Exercise
10	Share the different deliberation techniques - see table below
30	Practise Deliberation Phase 1 **Practice Round 1: Structured Deliberation (45 min)** ● Choose a **low-stakes but relevant scenario** (e.g., how to distribute a shared budget, or select a topic for an upcoming event). ● Assign roles: timekeeper, facilitator, observer (optional) **Technique**: Structured Go-Round + Clarifying Questions **Steps**:

| | 1. Round 1: Each person states their view (2 min max) 2. Clarifying questions round 3. Round 2: Each person responds or refines view 4. Summarize common ground & key tensions **Debrief**: ● What worked? ● What was hard? ● Who spoke more? Who held back? |
| | Practise Round 2: Another choice of deliberation, see table ● Gets a **new scenario** (e.g. public space redesign, refugee inclusion, climate action priorities) ● Chooses a **technique** to structure the discussion ● Practices for 30 minutes ● Presents back on: ○ Key insights ○ How the process shaped participation or outcomes |

Technique	Description	Best For
Structured Go-Rounds	Each person speaks in turn	Ensures equal voice
Fishbowl	Inner circle discusses, outer observes, then switch	Deep listening
Dot Voting / Consensus Mapping	Narrow options based on shared priorities	Clarifying values
World Café	Rotate small-group conversations	Gathering many perspectives
Open Space / Unconference	Participants choose discussion topics	Collective agenda setting
Deliberative Polling	Discuss & reflect on survey responses	Exploring shifts in opinion

D. **Creative Techniques for Deliberation**

E. In Athens, this module culminated in a Citizens' Assembly Roleplay session based on foresight. Participants were beamed through time in the midst of a 2029 poly-crisis. They enacted a scenario where they were asked to identify with a role (media representative, industry, citizen or policymaker). These roleplays helped them reflect on active listening in action and on power dynamics in group conversations.

Using cultural and artistic techniques can promote a more creative and exploratory assembly, as well as give agency and voice to people who may not express themselves so well in verbal forms. Creative Techniques for Deliberation were actively employed throughout the Democratic Odyssey assemblies to foster deeper engagement and inclusivity beyond traditional verbal exchange. In Athens, Playback Theatre was used to bring participants' stories and emotions to life through spontaneous performance, creating powerful moments of shared reflection. Florence introduced Human Tableau exercises, where participants physically embodied ideas and power dynamics, making abstract concepts tangible and visible within the group. In Vienna, embodied representations and participatory theatre techniques invited participants to explore themes through movement and role-play, enhancing empathy and collective understanding.

Building on these approaches, the Assembly in Athens also featured a Citizens' Assembly Roleplay session focused on foresight, which became a central technique for exploring complex scenarios. Participants were "beamed" into a 2029 poly-crisis and asked to assume roles such as media representatives, industry actors, citizens, or policymakers. This immersive exercise enabled them to practice active listening in real time, engage with power dynamics in group conversations, and reflect on decision-making under uncertainty, demonstrating the transformative potential of creative techniques in deliberation.

These creative methods offered diverse ways for participants to express themselves, connect with others, and engage critically with assembly topics, enriching the overall deliberative experience. Such techniques include:

- **Storytelling Circles:** Participants share personal stories related to a theme. Encourages active listening and empathy. Can be accompanied by music or visual aids to enhance the experience.
- **Art-Based Reflection:** Participants create visual art (painting, drawing, collage) to reflect on a particular topic or experience. After creating, they share and discuss their artworks with the group. Helps in expressing emotions and ideas non-verbally.
- **Theater Games:** Use improvisation and role-playing to explore issues and scenarios. Techniques such as "Forum Theatre" from Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed allow participants to act out situations and then re-enact them with alternative approaches.

- **Creative Writing Sessions:** Guided writing prompts that encourage participants to explore themes or issues creatively. Sharing written pieces with the group fosters connection and insight. Can include poetry, short stories, or even collaborative writing exercises.
- **Music, Dance and Movement** Music can be used to express collective emotions or tell a story.Facilitates collaboration and synchronisation Incorporate dance and movement to explore themes or emotions. Techniques such as "Dance/Movement Therapy" can be used to facilitate group connection and expression. Movement exercises can help break down barriers and build trust.
- **Photovoice:** Participants take photographs related to a specific topic or question. They then present their photos to the group and discuss the stories behind them. Can be used to highlight community issues or personal experiences.

25-50	**Citizen's Assembly Roleplay**
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	● How can facilitators act with integrity and inclusion? **Scenario 6: The Missing Voices** **Context**: Despite outreach, a citizens' assembly has no disabled participants and only one racialized member. The facilitators acknowledge this but continue as planned. **Questions**: ● How is power shaped by who is absent? ● What can be done mid-process to address exclusion? ● How do we make processes more structurally inclusive?

F. Power Module: Recognizing Power Dynamics within groups

This module was primarily designed and delivered for facilitators, recognizing their crucial role in holding awareness of power dynamics throughout the assembly process. Facilitators need to develop a nuanced understanding of visible, hidden, and invisible power to effectively manage group dynamics, promote equity, and foster inclusive participation. By engaging facilitators in reflective exercises and practical tools, the module aimed to enhance their capacity to identify power imbalances and respond to them with intentionality and care.

A main activity within this module focused on safeguarding, creating safe and respectful spaces where all participants feel protected from harm, including emotional, psychological, and systemic forms of violence. In the assemblies they were specifically trained to support participants in case of discomfort or exclusion and to intervene appropriately to uphold the assembly's brave space commitments.

Timing	What
10	Welcome & Purpose of the Session
10	Establishing Group Agreements - Brave Space Framework can be used, as described above.
20	**Icebreaker: Power in my Life** People are asked to reflect by themselves and then come together in small groups to share. ● "Where do you feel powerful in your life?"

	● "Where do you feel powerless?" Sharing in Pairs. Consider making the pairs based on caucuses so that people feel comfortable sharing. Debrief with the larger group: Have a bit of a group moment in which people can share more abstractly how it is for them sharing about power and powerlessness. Recommendation: noticing complexity, intersectionality.

20-30	**Understanding Power**
	
	Depending on the group's needs, see which concept of power is accessible to the group and useful for them to grow in their understanding of the deliberation ahead.
	
	Two suggestions below:
	
	Faces of Power Graphic
	    ○ Power to Win Demands
	    ○ Power to Drive the Agenda
	    ○ Power to Shape Common Sense
	    ○
	● **Types of Power**
	    ○ Visible power
	    ○ Hidden power
	    ○ Invisible Power

10-20	**Group Exercise on Power in the Room - Power Flower (see below)** The exercise on holding power below can be used to understand dynamics within a group. It requires quite a strong container already and people to know each other for a while. 1. Distribute a copy of the "Power Flower" (see Annex 1) to all participants. Explain that they can, but do not have to show it to others. 2. The participants should mark the inner or outer petal for each category, depending on what they identify more with. If they cannot associate with any of the two petals, they can add a third one. Basically, the decision is left to the participants' self-assessment. 3. When all participants have finished marking their worksheet, they create small groups (4-6 people) to discuss the Power Flower. The questions on the flip chart can be used for guidance. 4. Debriefing
	Analysing Power and Rank *Define the difference between power and rank* **Power:** The ability to influence, act, or create change. Not inherently bad — power

	becomes harmful when concentrated, unchecked, or unconscious. **Rank** is a social position or privilege, earned or unearned, that influences how much power one has in a given situation. What do we mean by rank? Rank is the power we have relative to one another in relationships, groups, communities and the world. Our rank is the sum of our privileges. Some kinds of rank are gained through life experience, others we are born in to. It is fluid and complex, and it depends on both the immediate context and the wider context. Everyone has both high and low rank at the same time, though in different amounts. For example, a white man can have less power than others in a given context, even though at the same time he still carries the rank of being white and male. There are different kinds of rank: **Present the different types of rank:** **Social rank:** the power that we have due to our social and cultural standing as part of a dominant group in society. These factors can be based on: ethnicity, gender, age, economics, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, education, health, body shape, and language. **Psychological Rank:** Psychological rank occurs when you have developed internal resources and abilities so that you have greater personal comfort and ease in addressing challenging situations **Structural rank**: the power we get in a particular setting, whether this is from our formal titles or positions at work, or informal and hidden rank. It can also be based on our status in a community. **Spiritual rank:** the power we get from feeling we have justice or a divine power on our side. It can keep us centred in the midst of a 'storm'. Psychological rank: the power we have if we feel secure in ourselves, from self-awareness and self-esteem. There are different sources, such as having been loved as a child, having our perceptions validated and having overcome difficulties and challenges, or surviving oppression and coming out the other side
	Tools to address Rank ● "Step up / step back" check-ins ● Shared facilitation (rotating roles: vibe-checker, timekeeper, equity guardian) ● Meta-moments: "Let's pause and notice the power in this moment" ● Nonviolent communication when confronting rank-based harm ● Feedback loops (asking for reflections on process, not just content)

	Analysing Subconscious Bias amongst participants.

Conclusion

The *Democratic Odyssey Repository of Training Materials* captures the learning journey of citizens, facilitators, and organizers who came together to practice new forms of democratic engagement across Europe. The modules on **active listening, decision-making, deliberation techniques, creative methods, and power awareness** not only supported the assemblies themselves but also created a toolbox that can be adapted and reused in a wide variety of contexts. Democratic deliberation is not a single method but a living practice that requires skills, care, and continuous reflection.

Annex

1. The Power flower

Flower diagram of social identity categories and their sub-categories:

- Age: Youthful, Elder/Child
- Ability Level: Able Bodied, Disabled
- Racialized: White, Non-White
- Education: Elementary/None, Post Secondary
- Biological Sex: Female, Male
- Sexual Orientation: Homosexual, Heterosexual
- Citizenship Status: Immigrant, Citizen
- Religion/Spirituality: Non Christian, Christian
- Socioeconomic Status: Poverty, Upper Class
- Language: English, Non English
- Gender Identity: Cis, Trans*