

International Youth Conference

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TOWARDS AN OPEN SOCIETY

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Preface

Over 30 years have elapsed since the Berlin Wall was torn down. A singular point in a poignant and powerful story of human sacrifice, thought, and action in pursuit of that elusive goal: **A Better World**. From classical civilisations, to the ideas of Popper, to our modern world, we have idolised this idea of an **Open Society**, in which individual rights and liberty are seen as inalienable, diversity is valued, and institutions function to serve the people.

The **International Youth Think Tank** (IYTT) recognises that we are moving away from this vision. We are a forum that aims to connect young people from all over the World with powerful decision makers to create a platform where innovative ideas can grow. By inviting decision makers with various backgrounds, IYTT can create practical solutions to the problems Europe and the World are facing.

Considering our confederation, the ideals of an engaged and **Open Society** are under attack. Human Rights are being violated, data is exploited, and the list goes on. We face a representation crisis, social inequality, a climate emergency, and many other alarming situations. The urgency and extent of these issues raise questions about the political framework and its efficiency. We as youth will experience the drastic effects of the ongoing inaction – **it is us that call for action**.

These proposals are, 30 years after that critical point in human history, the next step in history. Those who implement these ideas will be celebrated as pioneers who refused to allow the comfort of the status quo to limit the dynamism and potential of humanity to thrive in holistic terms. That potential is our potential.

The time to act is now!

Proposal 1: Expand Access to Education

An education failing to include individuals of all groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and stages of life is failing its purpose to create critically thinking and engaged individuals, able to actively take part in an **Open Society**. To help society and all individuals in it face challenges of globalisation, computer-information revolutions, and multicultural communities, we have developed proposals to **widen access to education** for individuals of all groups, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, and stages of life.

Solution: Recognition of vocational training

With the influence of changing cultural and economic structures, labour market requirements change as well. Employers feel [traditional academic degrees do not effectively prepare individuals for the reality of a job](#), while at the same time the “stamp” of an academic certificate is required in more areas of employment.

Therefore, we propose vocational training and practical experience to be acknowledged as qualifications to enter higher education institutions as well as being alternative qualifications to traditional formal learning when entering the labour market. An effective de-stigmatisation and promotion of vocational learning will [provide access to those coming from a non-traditional or non-academic background to higher income jobs at later stages in life](#), reflecting their level of expertise.

Solution: Lifelong learning opportunities

While academia – especially in higher education – tries to keep up with and adapt to rapidly changing technology, cultural developments, and structures in our societies, many workplaces and employers are often left behind. In order to continuously include individuals of all age groups and stages of employment into our dynamically evolving **Open Society**, we believe [lifelong learning to be crucial](#). Therefore, we demand a provision of learning opportunities in workplaces of all income brackets, but especially those who do not yet incorporate regular training modules.

Solution: Expansion of language learning and intercultural exchange opportunities

As our world becomes increasingly interconnected globally, foreign [language skills and intercultural understanding](#) are important in many workplaces. Therefore, we need to reach non-traditional participants of exchange programmes – such as Erasmus – and language-learning schemes by providing access to language learning and cultural exchange opportunities. In light of the recent increases to Erasmus funding, we therefore propose a more effective distribution of funding to low income individuals in need and an integration of similar schemes into workplaces that are not traditionally internationally oriented.

Solution: Inclusion of marginalised groups

To be truly open, we need to ensure the **inclusion of marginalised groups** such as refugees within the educational system: access to language classes, local culture classes, and a system of democracy education.

Continuing this inclusion, we propose opening the doors to immigrants or refugees with an employment background in education who don't have a nationally recognised certificate to become assistants in schools, to support regular teachers in teaching a class of mixed backgrounds. The goal is

to **better integrate classes** from different backgrounds by providing additional support, while at the same time making it possible for migrant teachers to find a way back into their profession.

Open Questions

To implement our proposals for extending access to learning, it is crucial to determine the roles of individuals, businesses and workplaces, non-formal organisations, and the government, and how they can complement each other in providing access to education and supporting vocational and lifelong learning opportunities for everyone.

Proposal 2: Reform the Educational System

With cultural, political, and scientific development in all areas of life, current methods of education have remained disappointingly rigid. Ineffective generalised education attempting to teach a very diverse group of individuals with the limited methods of traditional academia is failing to adapt to the challenges of an **Open Society** and leaves individuals unprepared. Therefore, we demand a reform of education through the **remodelling of teaching methods** and broadening of **non-traditional learning methods** to dynamically reach the diverse individuals wanting and needing to take part in an **Open Society**.

Solution: Democracy in education

Many individuals do not participate in democratic procedures, not because of lacking engagement, but because they feel that their voices are not being considered. To foster a **democratic mentality** and increase engagement in political happenings, students should not only learn about, but [perform democracy at every level of education](#).

Practical democratic workshops

We propose **practical workshops** on democratic topics to be part of the educational curriculum to complement traditional teaching methods and transform **Open Society** values into something tangible. We argue that such practical democratic workshops can be realised within an hour of consistent lecture time per week, potentially in the form of democratic games where students represent a country and negotiate a given topic to arrive at a common solution, following the examples of MUN or MEP. General guidelines should be to centre the current, [theoretical approaches into practical measures](#), so that the content can be related to the values of an **Open Society** and students are provided with a positive experience of the democratic process.

Mandatory Student Government Body

To expand on voluntary student governments present in some schools – who are often excluded from actual decision making – we propose a mandatory inclusion of student governments in all areas of primary and secondary education. This entails including **student representatives as voting members on school boards**. Additionally, participation in the student government body should be mandated, in order to encourage non-typical students to participate in democratic processes within the school. This could mean **mandatory voting for student representatives** as well as allowing time within the curriculum – such as hours of general assembly in regular time frames (e.g., once a semester) – for a full assembly of students to discuss and vote on issues affecting the entire student body, in addition to more frequent meetings of a smaller, voluntary, more dedicated group.

We believe this to be especially important to provide early positive experiences with democracy, which of course entails understanding the often-long-winded processes of democracy, but also recognising these efforts can have an impact and are not determined to fail because the administration ultimately disregards their conclusions.

Thematisation of political happenings

Currently, democracy, political systems, agenda of national parties, and potentially country-specific voting processes are only included in school curricula as graded, academic content. This does not differentiate learning about democratic issues from learning contents of other curriculum subjects, such as history or science.

In order to connect this theory to actual life and point out the relevance of democratic processes to everyday life and decisions concerning each individual, we propose **in-depth thematisation of political happenings in school**. This would mean not only discussing elections or controversial topics in current affairs, but also inviting politician panels to schools to host discussions with students. Such panels should be happening in close proximity in time to surrounding elections and should be student led (with potential faculty moderation). This will allow students to question and discuss political contents in light of the various stances of political parties, helping them to **form independent opinions** and consider a variety of arguments.

Democratic determination of sub-topics in the curriculum

Students are often paralysed in passive reception of educational content, since currently these are prescribed from above, without necessarily making connections clear to students. This leads to disengagement and indifference toward education. Genuine interests and curiosities about a subject that fall outside of the curriculum are generally brushed aside and labelled as irrelevant or not within the time or curriculum constraints.

Inspired by the [democratic school system](#), we therefore propose including options within curricula that students can vote on in order to provide them with **agency over their own education**. This would mean that within a certain subject (e.g., Biology) and potentially a sub-topic (e.g., an ecosystem), there would be different options (marine ecosystem, desert ecosystem, tropic ecosystem, etc.) that students within a class (or potentially within a school) could vote upon.

Solution: Adapting dynamically to changing media and technology

In order for education to be critical and relevant, it must face the evolving challenges to an **Open Society** as they emerge. Therefore, [dynamic and flexible education](#) is especially important.

Education about artificial intelligence and media literacy

As technology and applications of artificial intelligence are continuously changing and increasing, we find that there is a considerable knowledge gap in the general public. It is important for citizens to have an understanding of the automated decision processes that are operating within social media platforms, the technological devices they own, and many other applications of daily life.

Additionally, with the increasing presence of journalistic media online, on social media platforms, and on poorly or unmoderated platforms, judging whether content or a profile is fake is a crucial skill to be taught throughout the educational system in order to have conscious and active users of the Internet.

Therefore, we propose more thorough coverage of AI theories, automated decision processes and its applications, as well as theories of media literacy, visual literacy, and conscious internet usage in primary and further education. This goes hand-in-hand with [data coding literacy](#) as an emerging important skill in the digitalised world. To reach those outside the classical educational sphere, it is important to provide such **teaching through workplaces of all income brackets**, as well as providing publicly organised sessions available for the general public.

Mandatory training in software and hardware skills for teachers

As it is right now, many teachers and staff working in the administration of educational institutions do not have the necessary knowledge – neither about available software (such as

dynamic online teaching tools, mindmap drawing, interactive learning platforms) nor of facilitating hardware (e.g., smart whiteboards) – that is available for teaching. Often, students have greater knowledge about technologies in general (but not teaching technology specifically) than teachers, which may intimidate them to incorporate technologies over traditional pen-and-paper teaching methods.

Therefore, we propose **mandatory regular training for teachers and administrative staff** in educational institutions of all levels to make them aware of available technologies and give them confidence in using them. Incorporating teaching-supporting technologies into academic institutions should not mean using them wherever possible, but rather wherever *necessary*, and where their use can provide an advantage over traditional teaching methods. Being able to recognise where such applications are appropriate is another important point of training for teaching staff.

Solution: Broaden internationally oriented learning

Since an Open Society naturally reaches further than national borders and requires increased international understanding and awareness, we see it as a crucial point to actively incorporate [intercultural and internationally oriented learning](#) into education.

Therefore, all learning processes should [focus on internationalism through specific practices, cultivating an international mindset from a young age](#). One example could be the creation of an international platform among schools. On such a platform, students from different countries could communicate, play games, or even assist each other with different topics in an educational context as part of the curriculum. Thus, all students would have the opportunity not only to be exposed to different cultures and mindsets, but also to improve their language skills (as the working language can be one other than English).

Moreover, to improve the orientation of education to a more international level, we need a more international and universal point of view when it comes to subjects such as history, economics, and politics – not focusing solely on national or European topics. Pupils should acquire international knowledge – even from an early age – in order to escape their national bubble and start developing a **unified and all-embracing mentality**, both of which are crucial aspects of an **Open Society**.

Open Questions

In order to implement the proposed changes to education, there must be a detailed assessment on a case-by-case basis of how they can be integrated into the specific curricula of different countries: How much leeway can we give to allow for this? Where do we need to define rigid guidelines to ensure an actual impact? Should such education be developed within the EU framework, or through lower-level cooperation between countries?

Proposal 3: Reviving the Democratic Tree: Enhancing Participation and Accountability of Our Leaders

We are told our political systems are wavering, with citizens' trust in democratic institutions being eroded. Globalisation processes have been dealt with by our political elites in a way that apparently dissatisfies the many, leading to a worsening detachment of our leaders from the citizenry. The latter, in turn, feels the political machine has become too centralised, occupied by insular elites perceived as distant from ordinary people. Citizens are increasingly disengaged not only with their representatives, but also with democratic participation itself, as traditional democratic instruments (i.e., elections and referenda) seemingly fail to deliver any real change.

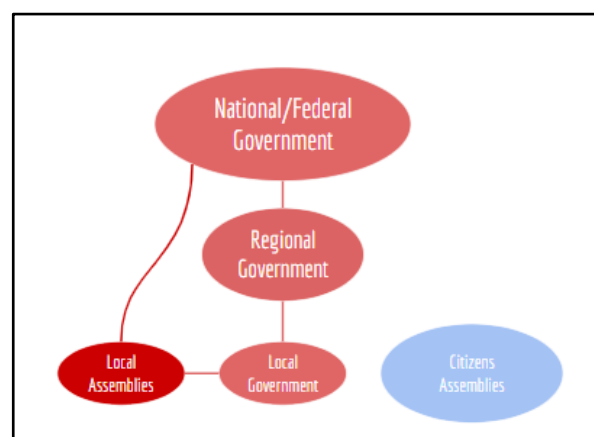
In order to rejuvenate our cherished democratic tree, we devised an overarching mechanism made up of two complementary tools to be incorporated within our systems' institutional architecture. It has been designed bearing in mind the bidirectionality of the representation process: on the one hand, **representatives (elected politicians) act on behalf of the represented (the electorate)** within the Parliament, through a direct act of representation; on the other hand, **the represented must be able to hold their representatives accountable** – yet, accountability seems elusive and out of reach to the broader public. Such tools therefore address both issues: local assemblies should tackle disengagement and enhance citizens' participation, whereas a national civic committee should allow for higher transparency, responsiveness, and accountability on the part of political elites. Definitively, we believe that most of the discontent citizens express has a common critic, disaffection for modern institutions and how they don't feel represented, related to the professionalisation of politics. Let us delve deeper into the proposal.

Solution: Participation – local assemblies

The first gear of the mechanism consists of **Local Assemblies**, informal institutions that gather local community members. Bolstering citizens' participation is the necessary starting point of any conceivable democratic project; for democratic citizenship is first and foremost an involved and participative type thereof. Only when citizens take commitment and participate, can a political system be truly democratic. When we take it into a more communal and local framework, we want to get the institution closer to citizens, making it more deliverable and transformative.

In such assemblies, active discussions arise over issues directly affecting the community; subsequently, organisation and implementation of a certain range of initiatives are debated and communicated directly to local-, regional- and state-level authorities. This should help **strengthen the bonds between citizens and politicians**, both at governmental and local levels, in order for people to feel they have a say in public questions.

Local assemblies differ from more traditional citizens assemblies insofar as they will be digitised: they will essentially operate as online platforms, thus ensuring **greater accessibility and effectively combating discriminations**. Clearly, local communities must be provided with widespread online access both in urban and rural areas (the accent on inclusiveness is crucial – the more diverse and inclusive a democracy, the stronger it will be). Discussions can thus continue virtually uninterrupted, while holding physical debates (as is the



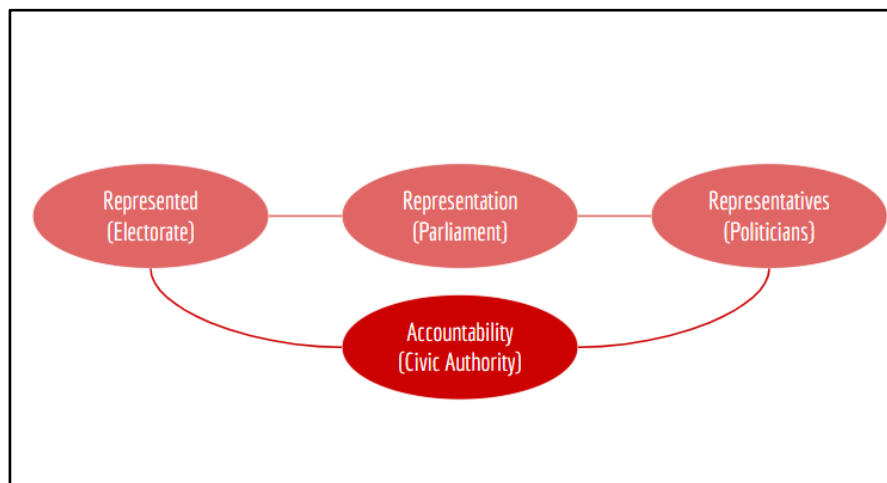
case with citizens assemblies) is much more difficult; furthermore, this could help phasing out at least some layers of bureaucracy. Success has already been witnessed on a limited scale: in Iceland, citizens assemblies were involved in drafting the new constitution. As a matter of fact, the country is 2nd on the democracy index and witnessed an exceptional voter turnout of 81 percent at the latest parliamentary election.

Solution: Accountability – a national civic committee

The representation crisis faced by our democracies also has much to do with accountability and responsiveness. This builds on the aforementioned disengagement of the public: as citizens grow generally disaffected by politics, it becomes harder to hold representatives accountable – thus fuelling a vicious cycle that definitely needs to be broken. As a matter of fact, **enhancing the system’s transparency, responsiveness, and accountability can restore people’s trust in democratic institutions.**

We suggest instituting a **National Civic Committee**: an intermediate body to flank legislative assemblies. Its primary task should be that of providing reports, opinions, and recommendations to the national parliament – even without being explicitly asked to do so by the latter. The committee should function as an independent body constantly monitoring the work of the legislative: it is “civic” inasmuch as it is made up of **common citizens instead of public officials** (its members being chosen out of a lottery mechanism, in jury style, within the basin of national residents). This clearly implies that said recommendations cannot be legally binding for the parliament, who retains the legislative power it was elected to wield.

Nevertheless, ignoring such recommendations would prove politically untenable for MPs or the government (at least in principle), due to the high visibility the media should give to the committee’s work. A **lively, genuine media sector is vital to heighten transparency and openness** along the whole



deliberative process. As a matter of fact, everything produced by the committee will be made **publicly available**; moreover, its meetings and activities will be live-streamed and Q&A sessions will be held via web – through the same digital infrastructure that is to be devised for local assemblies. We have seen a similar model in the live-streamed European Parliament sessions, which we consider an effective tool to achieve accountability, inclusiveness, and transparency.

Open Questions: Options and considerations

To be sure, a similarly devised twofold mechanism is not going to solve the deep representation crisis we find our systems entangled in, nor is it going to drastically heal the much talked-about “democratic fatigue” at once. What we think it can actually achieve, however, is to gradually soothe the former and ease the latter.

The only way our democratic temples can be restored is by going back to the core of democracy as a radically progressive idea: people – citizens. More than a century and a half ago, Abraham Lincoln reiterated the most fundamental principle when it comes to define the democratic government: it is the **government of the people, by the people, and for the people**. In the last decades, we have come to interpret the democratic government as qualitatively different from the demos it ought to represent. We need to tackle this unsettling conception: in so doing, bringing civil society back to the heart of democratic deliberation is of utmost importance. Citizens need to rediscover their government is not there *for* them: **it is them**. As Peter Mair rightly pointed out, the void has been widening between citizens (who are increasingly disengaged from politics) and politicians (who are in turn retreating into the State); unless we are able to bridge such a gap, the democratic promises of equality and inclusiveness will hardly be fulfilled. We want to take back the Renaissance ideas where the idea of individuals was reconsidered and included as the main actors in society.

This is why we sought to reassert the centrality of citizens through two tools that we believe should be embedded and integrated with our institutional systems. This overarching mechanism can be thought of as a **third democratic option** – halfway between regular elections and more direct consultations like referenda. It is indeed an attempt to **institutionalise accountability, inclusiveness, openness, and transparency**.

However, we are well aware that a number of issues arise when going from conceiving to actually implementing these ideas. Let us briefly go through some of them: we will start with the problems posed by Local Assemblies and then deal with those posed by the National Civic Committee.

Selected problems with local assemblies

- Anonymity: Digitised local assemblies will require users to register with an official identification document so as to avoid trolls, hate speeches, fake or misleading content, and so on. Nevertheless, **some people might not feel legitimate** to cast their opinions for several reasons: some level of anonymity should therefore be considered to encourage more reluctant citizens not to censor their views.
- Digitisation: To what extent should assemblies be digitised? Should they be held online in their entirety, or should traditional physical gatherings continue to exist alongside them? Could a good compromise be reached by keeping physical assemblies at the local level while digitising the local-national dialogue? **Can inclusiveness and digitalisation work together?**
- Incentives: The ultimate goal of these assemblies is that of fostering a more active and participative democratic culture in citizens. But **will more reluctant (or maybe less educated?) individuals need some sort of incentive** to change their habits and actually participate? And if so, how should such incentives be designed?
- Borders: **What borders should define what is included in the community and what is not?** What demarcation criteria should we adopt? How can we ensure that minorities and other groups (not reflected in the local/national census) are not discriminated upon?
- Organisation: How and by whom should assemblies be organised? What standardised organisational pattern should be followed? Moreover, **who decides what issues are to be debated** and what results are to be submitted to the government?

Selected problems with the national civic committee

- **Membership:** Having members of the committee mirroring the broader society is anything but an easy task (the same is true, incidentally, for national parliaments). If such members are to be randomly selected, **there is a good possibility that a specific sector of the civil society gets overrepresented** (e.g., a professional sector).
- **Quotas:** A relatively obvious solution to the problem would be that of introducing **quotas in order to assure that the committee's membership is as close to the real citizenry as possible**. But how should such quotas be defined? Along which lines should we split or cluster the broader national community (profession, status, age, sex, education, geographical provenance, etc.)?
- **Term in office:** How long would we want committee members to serve in office? If the committee is to be efficient in its activity and to have some degree of stability and continuity, we might prefer to institute a longer term for its members (at least a couple of years). Nevertheless, this may prove problematic as **it could lead to the professionalisation of committee membership** – something politicians are often criticised for. Even worse, what is originally conceived as a technical body might end up being “hijacked” by long-running members and become politicised, radicalising the public debate and maybe igniting inter-institutional frictions.
- **Assurances and incentives:** Participation should clearly be voluntary. Still, ordinary citizens might not want to be “kidnapped” from their daily lives (family, work, duties, etc.); moreover, should some sort of assurances be granted to dependent workers not to be laid off? And should similar assurances be granted to businesspersons as well, not to stop running their businesses (e.g., SMEs) while working in the committee? **Should incentives of any type be designed?** And if so, in what form (economic incentives, “shield legislation”, etc.)? Should such incentives be tailored to different social sectors? Does this have need of necessary cooperation with the private sector to work?

Answering these and similar questions is far from easy and will take a lot of effort not to result in anti-democratic measures in any conceivable respect. Yet, this is what we need to do in order to make the whole mechanism workable. **Questions of inclusiveness, diversity, openness, and “democraticity” are urgently pending** upon our political and institutional systems: failing to address them in a proper way will likely prove extremely detrimental for our cherished democracies. We are not saying that this is the only solution, nor are we suggesting that different approaches cannot deal with the same issues effectively. We are rather saying that some solution needs to be intensively and seriously thought about; and it seems clear to us that some institutional adjustment is needed to cope with the complexity of 21st century societies. What is sure, however, is that going from the democratic ideal to tangible democratic setups requires boldness, the will to compromise, and solidarity to not leave anyone behind.

To ensure that we have demographic representation of these areas, we would suggest introducing an Inclusive Leadership Pledge for the EU, starting with Sweden. This Pledge would warrant national and European businesses, governing bodies, and other institutions to ensure they are inclusive, for example having a culturally diverse board of leaders. Arguably, this would be an effective way of narrowing the representation crisis because it means that there should be a balanced board of individuals that differ in relation to their race, gender, sexuality, religion, and social background and perspectives. In addition, it will also help with the problem of democratic fatigue as residents will feel that their voices are being heard, and therefore that their votes matter. The way that the Inclusive Leadership Pledge would work is that a declaration would be written and leaders of the local and national government, businesses and other institutions would sign their signatures pledging to make their organisations more inclusive. The declaration would include promises such as *“We pledge to*

make businesses more inclusive and representative of our diverse population by including more women of colour in our leadership team".

However, though an **Inclusive Leadership Pledge** as a potential solution would be successful, there are various setbacks that we need to consider. If the Pledge is introduced as a policy to begin with, it means that businesses and governments can choose whether to enforce inclusivity or not, meaning that without it being a law, it is very likely that many organisations will not sign the pledge, as there are no legal consequences. Furthermore, the Inclusive Leadership Pledge can also be misused to reflect the organisations in a better light, so they can be more favourable to the people. For instance, some may sign the pledge as a way to appeal to people of a lower social background to illustrate they are “inclusive”, and in the run up to elections some parties could misuse the pledge in an attempt to get more votes. This would be a major setback because it would mean that the seriousness of the pledge is being taken for granted and may only be used for “token” reasons. To overcome this, we would need to legalise the pledge so that those who misuse it would face the necessary consequences, as the representation crisis and democratic fatigue can only be reduced when solutions such as the Inclusive Leadership Pledge are used and **acted upon effectively**.

Proposal 4: Enforce Human Rights

We aspire to **place Human Rights at the heart of our Open Society**. We see the respect of human rights of every individual regardless of their nationality, race, gender, or sexual orientation as indispensable in the structure of any society.

Human Rights violations have occurred all around the world, regardless of commitments to the principles and values expressed in innumerable human rights declarations and treaties. The independence of Human Rights-oriented NGOs is being undermined through illegitimate measures such as censorship, funding cuts, and oppression of free journalism. Political alliances and geostrategic interests are being put forward at the expense of human lives, and respect for human rights is sacrificed in the name of short-term economic gains. It is time that we unite our efforts in boldly stating that **Human Rights must not be circumvented under any circumstances**. It is time that we insist on **governmental adherence to human rights commitments** through increasing international monitoring, promoting awareness among the civil society and thus increasing pressure on non-complying states and international actors.

Solution: Hold governments accountable for acting upon Human Rights commitments

We demand that governments and the international community act upon the universality of Human Rights, but **for real** now!

We strongly believe and recognise the power and responsibility of the international community. We want to build an understanding on an international level of the **indispensability and universality of Human Rights** as a powerful tool to assert that the **rights and dignity of every individual** is what lays the foundations of any **Open Society**.

We aim to achieve that through insistence on reforming national judicial systems, bringing transparency to the core of any judicial process, and guaranteeing impartiality of judicial judgements. We also demand that **every individual should have free access to the justice system**.

It is also important to emphasise that governments can hold each other accountable for their actions. **Governments must comply with Human Rights declarations** and treaties that they are signatories to. This could be achieved through peer monitoring, enforcement, and constructivist efforts in strengthening public awareness of the indispensability of Human Rights adherence. A strong civil society is an indisputable guarantee towards transparency and compliance. Respect for International Law and compliance is achievable not only through “hard politics”, but also through a bottom-up approach in which **people are empowered through knowledge, awareness, and multicultural understanding** of the inherent human dignity and rights of any individual. On an international level, we insist that compliance is ensured through economic and political sanctions, increased mediated pressure on violators, and legal consequences.

The **revival of public awareness and empowering knowledge** about what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights means to people all over the world who have, at certain stages of their lives, been subject to discrimination, oppression, and marginalisation, is a starting point for huge change into how we conceptualise international priorities. We stress that **people come before interests**. We call for mobilisation, empowered agency, and genuine commitment to the values of an **Open Society**. We insist on stating that **Human Rights are not a matter of a question but of a matter of Fact**. We have been talking about Human Rights for hundreds of years – **now it is time to take concrete action**.

Proposal 5: Put Youth in Charge

Although young people between the ages of 15 and 24 constitute about 25 percent of the world's population, their participation and influence in formal politics remain limited. This creates the feeling of **alienation among young people** and a general sense of not being listened to, which negatively impacts further political involvement. The **right to participate** in a country's political and electoral processes is a **basic Human Right**. The **underrepresentation of youth** in parliaments and governments across the globe is a serious issue which undermines democracy and threatens the equal right of every citizen to take part in decision-making processes, inevitably leading to missed opportunities for **building intergenerational consensus** within our societies.

Solution: Enact change with electoral quotas

We demand the **adoption of electoral quotas for youth** in parliaments in order to be able to truly name them "democratic". Our **Open Society** depends on inclusivity and the **democratic representation of all groups** in our communities, regions, and the state as a whole. Therefore, the opinions of youth must be reflected in the legislative and executive bodies of the state and the policies which they initiate. The implementation of a **proportional youth quota** for young people to stand as members of parliament would encourage youth to have a guaranteed say and to be listened to when it comes to decision-making.

Our insistence on implementing a youth quota is about bringing a new perspective. It is about the **right of democratic representation**. It is about taking young people seriously and bringing them and their valuable opinions to the table. In order to foster the election of young members of parliaments under 35–40 years of age, we demand that youth quotas be adopted in respect to the proportion of young people in a state and its demographic characteristics.

Our demand aims to encourage and promote the **intergenerational dialogue in society**. Through this measure, we could truly strive for an **Open Society** that listens and takes into account the rights and duties of every individual and works towards **inclusion and real democracy**. Youth quotas are not an artificial method for placing young people in charge. **Youth quotas are a necessity** until democracy is truly enacted, corrupt and exclusionary practices eliminated, and awareness raised that everyone is capable of contributing in an **Open Society**.

We recognise the importance of a better and more democratic access to the decision-making process. This is why we propose placing the focus on **youth empowerment** through adequate **civil education** as well as on increasing the opportunities for **formal and non-formal engagement of young people**. Skills and confidence will facilitate bringing the burning issues identified by the youth population of any country to the political agenda and be addressed through an inclusive and open process of intergenerational dialogue and concrete policy decisions.

Proposal 6: Empower through Legal Knowledge

Societies and their citizens require knowledge of the system we live in. The way to empower people to create change is to give them proper tools and opportunities to do so. Therefore, we propose including legal training and access to legal resources as a mandatory part of our society.

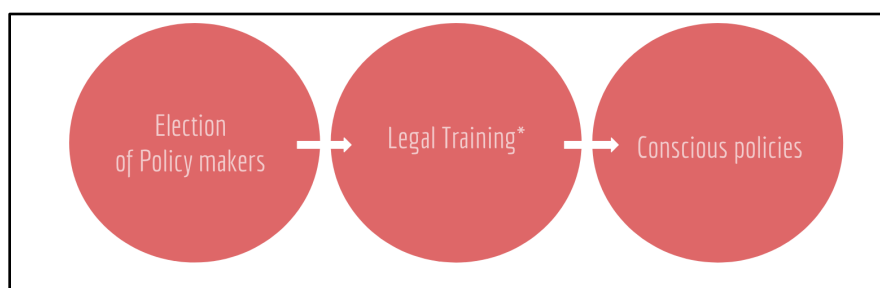
Solution: Mandatory legal training for policy makers

Some laws are passed without respect for Human Rights and general legal rules: their place in the legal system, existing legislation, and boundaries that the system sets. **The lack of awareness of human rights and no actual knowledge of law among the policymakers is a big issue.** Not only does it provoke legislative initiatives that are not beneficial, but it also impedes policymakers from acting and being efficient in the implementation of their ideas. When you start a new job, you are obliged to go through mandatory training, whether you work in an office or as a waiter; however, when new policymakers are elected – mostly on the basis of their ideas – in many places they are not required to undergo training for their law-making tasks, which affect so many people.

If any other job requires training, policymakers should be trained too – to acquire the tools to implement their ideas and to make conscious policies. Therefore, we set forward a demand for a **mandatory legal and Human Rights training for policymakers**. After election, policy-makers should be trained on:

- legal systems;
- Human Rights;
- the decision-making process;
- representation duties;
- and diplomacy.

Legal training would be also important in making **policy-making accessible for people of different backgrounds**, not only those who had educational opportunities or a lot of experience. The marginalised groups – youth, the working class, the less privileged – who have less resources and possibilities would be **given the tools to make themselves heard** and not be disregarded, in the election process, on the basis of their lack of knowledge and experience.



Solution: Accessibility of legal resources

Engagement of people in society is low; civic action is often taken only by the more privileged (well-off, educated, not a part of a minority). People do not feel that they can influence political decisions and thus do not engage,

People are not aware enough about the way in which the legal system works – what are their rights and responsibilities, but also what are the responsibilities of the policymakers towards them, and in what way can they influence them? They do not advocate for themselves.

Creating an **accessible legal resource that everyone is free to use** will empower people to **advocate for themselves**, having access to the context in which the policymakers work and gain the tools to discuss and decide. This would give individuals an incentive to engage, as they would feel more effective by seeing results, making it harder for them to feel small. This could be through legal training, consultations, publications, or starting an online platform that is easy to use and provides easily understandable explanations of law (that not only lawyers are able to understand).

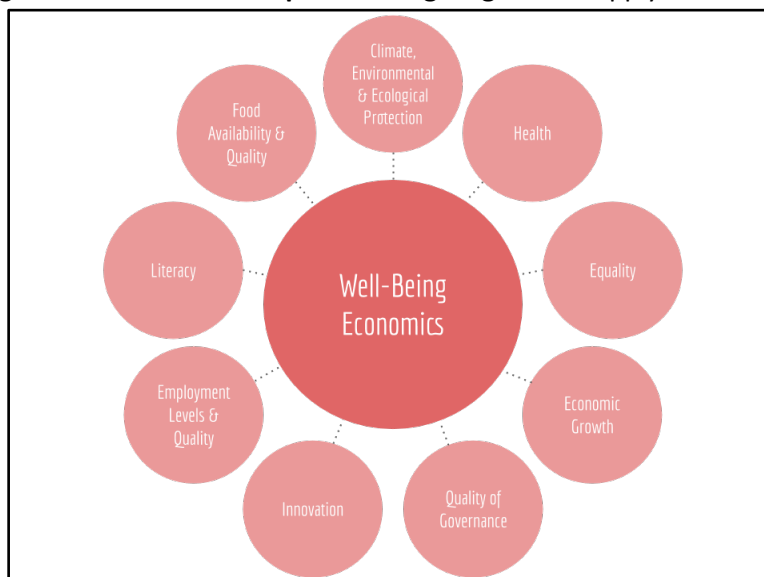
Proposal 7: Repurpose Economics

We strongly believe in the need to **repurpose the orthodox economic doctrine**. The discipline has fallen victim to the law of the instrument, where economists have become blinded by their own set of concepts to the point that it is hard for them to understand the world beyond their “toolset”. This is a critical issue that must be addressed if we are to come up with innovative solutions to new challenges. While we should not throw away the entirety of economics as we know it, we must **identify its problems and address them constructively**. For this, it is important to avoid irrational gatekeeping and instead **promote a plurality of voices and debates** within the discipline.

Solution: Well-being as the starting point

A practical way in which we can “repurpose” our economy is through ditching GDP as the main proxy for well-being and instead **focus on more direct measures**. While it is a powerful and useful variable, GDP growth – and its zealot-like pursuit – is environmentally unsustainable, and in many instances, detrimental to the well-being of the broader population. It is often argued that GDP is the best (or least-worst) measure we have for our economy; however, in the data-rich world we live in today – *is it really?*

Learning from the successes and shortcomings of the [Gross National Happiness Index](#) first introduced in Bhutan, and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it would be possible for **governments to develop well-being targets** and apply them to economic policy-making. For this, a



series of internationally recognised benchmarks should be agreed on. These would largely build upon the United Nations’ SDGs and help in reaching the level of cross-country comparability that GDP currently allows.

Multilateralism therefore needs to be, on the one hand, the basis for this systematic change, as many of these measures would be externally evaluated (such as quality of governance) for new standards to be as globally respected as GDP. On the other

hand, the possibilities for data disaggregation of such well-being indexes are enormous; in other words, governments would be able to target issues in the economy much more effectively than just hoping for a “trickle-down” effect like they currently do.

Innovative methods of quantification should be explored through channels ranging from traditional surveying all the way to social media. In as much as we have to bring humanity into economics, we must simultaneously be able to quantify these ideas to produce **evidence-based policies**.

Overall, economic “repurposing” must focus on finding as-good alternatives to the socially inefficient status quo that may begin to push us towards a more humane and sustainable future. What **used to be thought of as impossible is now becoming perfectly feasible** with the integration of Big Data into

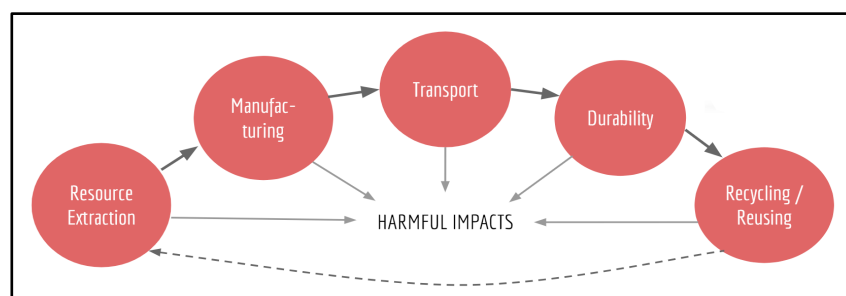
governance – we just need the will to put this knowledge to use in order to develop **innovative solutions**. In other words, just about doing the trick does not cut it anymore: **we can do better!**

Proposal 8: Enhance Supply Chain Disclosure

Details about the conditions of production processes are still highly elusive to consumers. The quality of products – as well as workers' rights, business ethics, and environmental occupation – are all issues that consumers, institutions, and civil society organisations alike must be informed about to make rational purchasing choices. In the past, full supply chain disclosure was technologically impossible; however, the advent of AI and blockchain poses an opportunity for governments to double down on **end-to-end transparency**.

Solution: Make the supply chain transparent and available

Revealing the supply chain would entail the origin of resources, methods, and conditions of manufacturing, especially for involved workers, as well as the environmental and climatic impact of the entire production process and supply chain. Similarly, information about the durability of a product itself should be revealed where possible. The idea is that **readily available information about products will influence the purchasing choices of consumers**, who will then avoid badly ranked items. In the long-run, this should encourage the formation of a **circular economy**, if firms decide to address the problems in their supply chains. All of this information could be conveyed both in short form in the product's tag, but also at length online. Consequently, everyone will have the opportunity to learn and act upon any violation of the society or its environment.



Solution: Legal enforcement of product labelling

Moreover, there needs to be **legal enforcement for labelling products** through certificates, such as ISO 14000 family of standards. As it currently stands, CO₂ emission labelling is only used on a voluntary basis by producers, largely for eco-friendly marketing purposes. Nevertheless, this method does not guarantee any consistent or coherent labelling. There must be **explicit regulations on how environmental impact is measured and reported**. Once a legal enforcement is set in place, **governments should support businesses in the certification of their products**, as it may be too costly for many and increase entry barriers to the markets for newcomers. While accountability must be improved, this does not necessarily have to become a bureaucratic nightmare for the business sector – a streamlined approach would be preferred.

In as much as the business sector often opposes initiatives like these for posing excessive red tape, supply chain transparency could also benefit companies due to **increased customer trust and total turnover**. According to a recent study conducted by MIT Sloan, consumers that are more empathetic for others' well-being tend to show preference for brands reflecting those values (because of their pro-social status). Businesses can capitalise on that by reforming their marketing strategy to strengthen their brand value.

Proposal 9: Democratising Tax

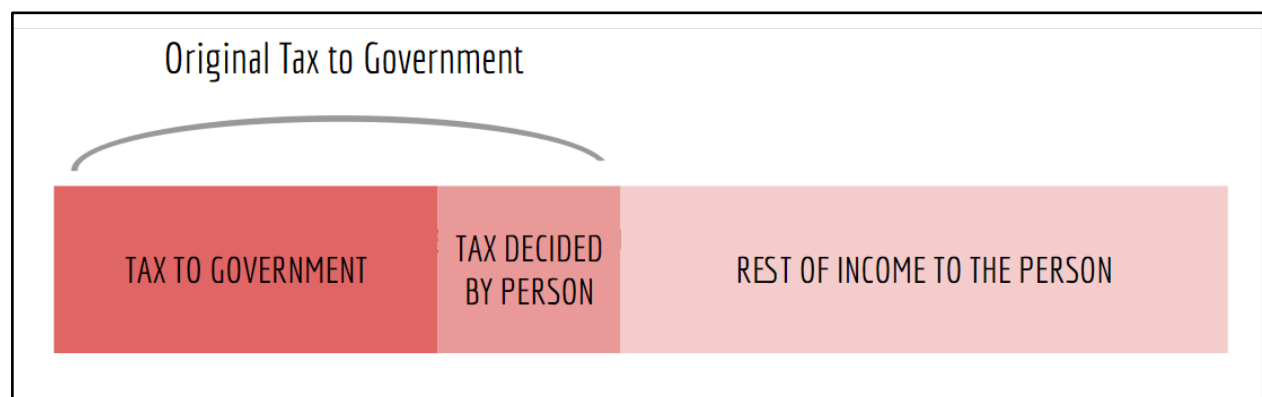
Our vision of an **Open Society** is largely government led. It involves costly policies, culture changes to public spending, and a radical reallocation of funds – this brings the issue of **taxation – and the ways in which the principles of democracy and liberty can be brought into it** – right to the forefront.

Moreover, NGOs are shackled by the bureaucratic process, having to meet multiple people in government over a number of months in order to secure funding. In a number of months, however, our climate has deteriorated further, homelessness has increased, the migrant crisis grows, suicide rates increase, and much more.

Solution: Direct citizen NGO funding

We propose cutting out the middleman, making **NGO funding a direct conversation between taxpayers and the civil sector**. This sort of system allows for more dynamism, and could reflect more accurately the agenda of the people, as they will be able to vote with their money directly. That means **the people can directly fund the issues** close to their heart.

The idea is simple: Individuals will pay a lower mandated rate of tax (to fund a *basic social programme*), then will have **agency over a percentage** that previously would have been allocated for the civil sector. They can use this percentage to fund the NGOs dealing with the issues important to them, known as the **extended social programme**, better described in the figure below.



Solution: Regulate free market principles and their issues

At the very core of the argument is the free market. The free market is both liberal and efficient, fixing the two problems we posed above. By allowing agency over a proportion of taxation, we create a **self-regulating system of taxation and redistribution**. If there is a demand for solving a particular issue, then market forces will distribute the income. While this achieves liberty and efficiency, there is another non-economic element to this. As in the market, agents have direct control of their actions – the people will also be forced to be at some level directly involved in society. This means citizens will be far more engaged in our political systems, social issues, and have direct control over what society they would endeavour to see.

Unfortunately, as with the free market, there are some tangible dangers. First is the idea that by freeing a proportion of taxes, there could be some level of immorality and exploitation in the system. As a measure to stop this, while maintaining efficiency, is by **digitising this decision-making process**. NGOs would apply and be assessed by an independent board, which will consider the ethical nature of the company. For example, a specific danger would be that this system may be corrupted by

individuals reinvesting this income into their own business, rather than in the spirit in which it was intended: to solve some social issue. The independent board would stop this. While we accept individuals are inherently moral, we don't want some individuals exploiting the system in malign self-interest.

Another problem with the application of the free market is that there are in cases some NGOs which aren't particularly marketable that may lose out, even if they are achieving some morally and socially good outcome. This is alleviated by the percentage of tax left under government control, which, as the figure above shows, leaves enough taxation for the government to fund basic social programmes. However, the **excess to be used for investment in pertinent social issues prior to the tax reform, will now be democratised**, so that individuals decide how to allocate to an *extended social programme*. In sum, the government will still pay some income to allow NGOs (who will receive less income under the new system) to continue to function and advertise until the issue that they are promoting becomes important to the public, with the **democratised portion of tax serving only to supplement and extend** the basic governmental social programme.

By implementing these free market principles, we solve the original problems of inefficiency (and rigidity in allocation) and the paradox posed by the question of liberty. With the amendments and regulation of the free market, we solve the subsequent problems that the free market of taxation creates and as such, we consequently have an implementable demand that is durable and superior to the current system.

Open Questions

Beyond the conceptualisation of this new tax regime, how and when would people decide where their taxes will go? Similarly, to what extent would this reflect the "agenda of the people", considering top earners' preferences would be "worth" more and weigh more in the overall extended social programme expenditures? These two key aspects would be worth discussing to further strengthen and expand on the proposal.

Conclusion

The nine proposals presented in this report offer a range of different – yet interconnected – policies that contribute towards building an **Open Society**. As an antidote to the many challenges that we currently face as a society, we recommend a mix of: **more democracy; extended and deepened accountability networks; and inclusivity of marginalised groups and voices.**

These three ideas powered **every proposal made**, and *must* do so with the ones to come.

The world is currently undergoing an age of radical transformation. This may not seem apparent, as it is often brushed off as simply another populist wave making its way around the world. We could not be any more wrong. A series of challenges to our **Open Society**-oriented belief system have come about, and an alternative to our system has too – namely the technocratic authoritarianism that we see in increasingly more countries. We could then think of this as a “survival of the fittest” situation: whichever system provides the most dynamic answer to such challenges will become the new global standard. These challenges, such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, political disenfranchisement, or the imminent environmental catastrophe, pose a threat to society as we know it, whilst also offering an opportunity for change.

We need **new measures and updated frameworks** in order to accommodate changing circumstances – and this is precisely what ought to be done as we dive into an increasingly mechanical, digital, and global 21st century in an unsustainably exploited planet Earth. The youth is not demanding change because we want it – **we demand it because we need it.**

We stand at the doorstep of a new era and **we are the ones that will live in it**, so we must now reshape the rules of the game if we are to keep playing. Previous generations should have done this, but they did not.

It is now the youth who come to the forefront and **demand change.**

Thank You to the Sponsors of the International Youth Conference 2019



Appendix

Slides from Final Presentation
(November 14, 2019)



Violations of
Human
Rights

Climate
Emergency

Representation
Crisis

Data
Exploitation

Social
Inequality

International Youth Think Tank (IYTT)

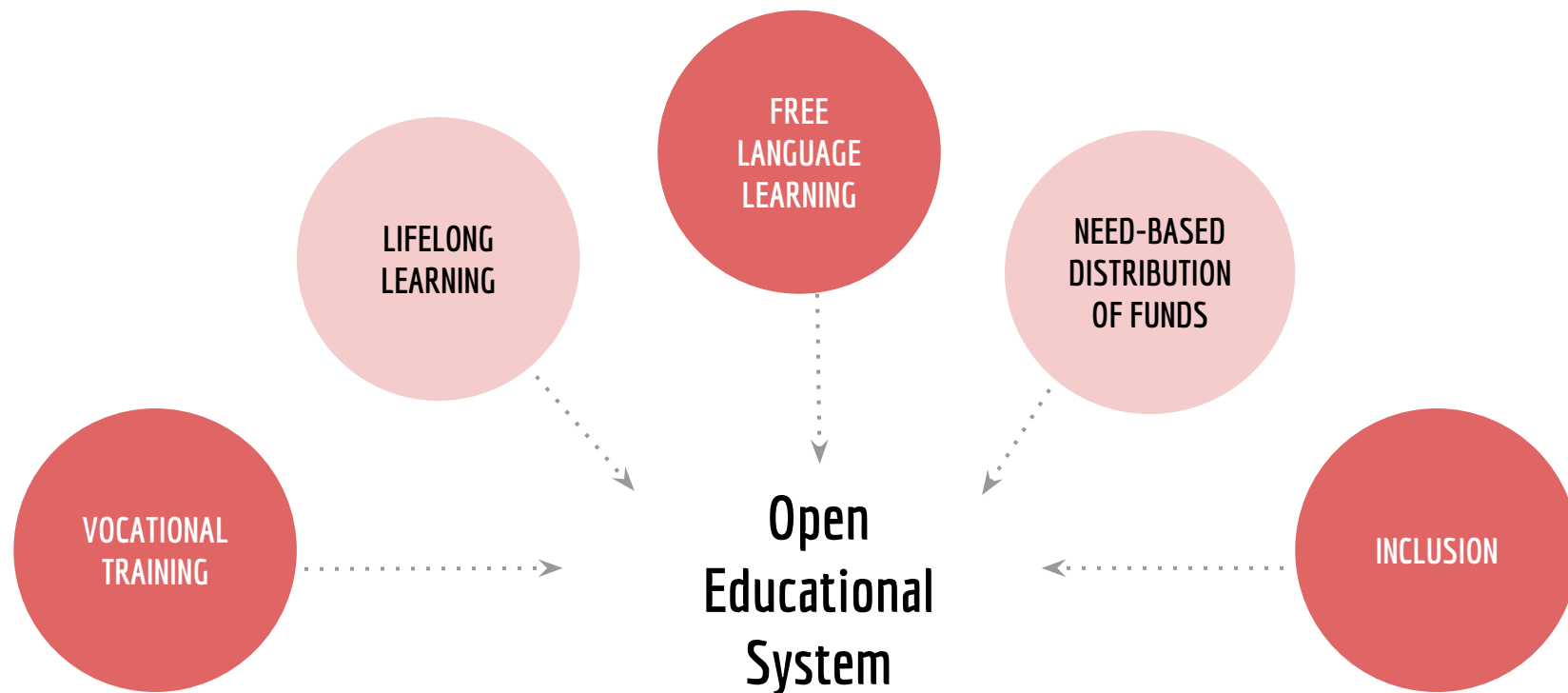
31 participants, 18 countries, 18-24 year-olds

International Youth Conference Report



Preview by Five Presenters

Demand 1 : Expand Access to Education



Demand 2: Reform Education

Practical Workshops



Democratic Mentality



Critical Engagement



Media Literacy

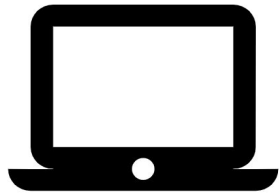


Digitalised Education



Demand 3 : Enable Local Assemblies

Combat the representation crisis at a **local level** and promote accessibility of political dialogue



Digitised Democracy

Create an online platform to promote access to assemblies



Legitimised Assemblies

Establish credible local assemblies recognised nationally

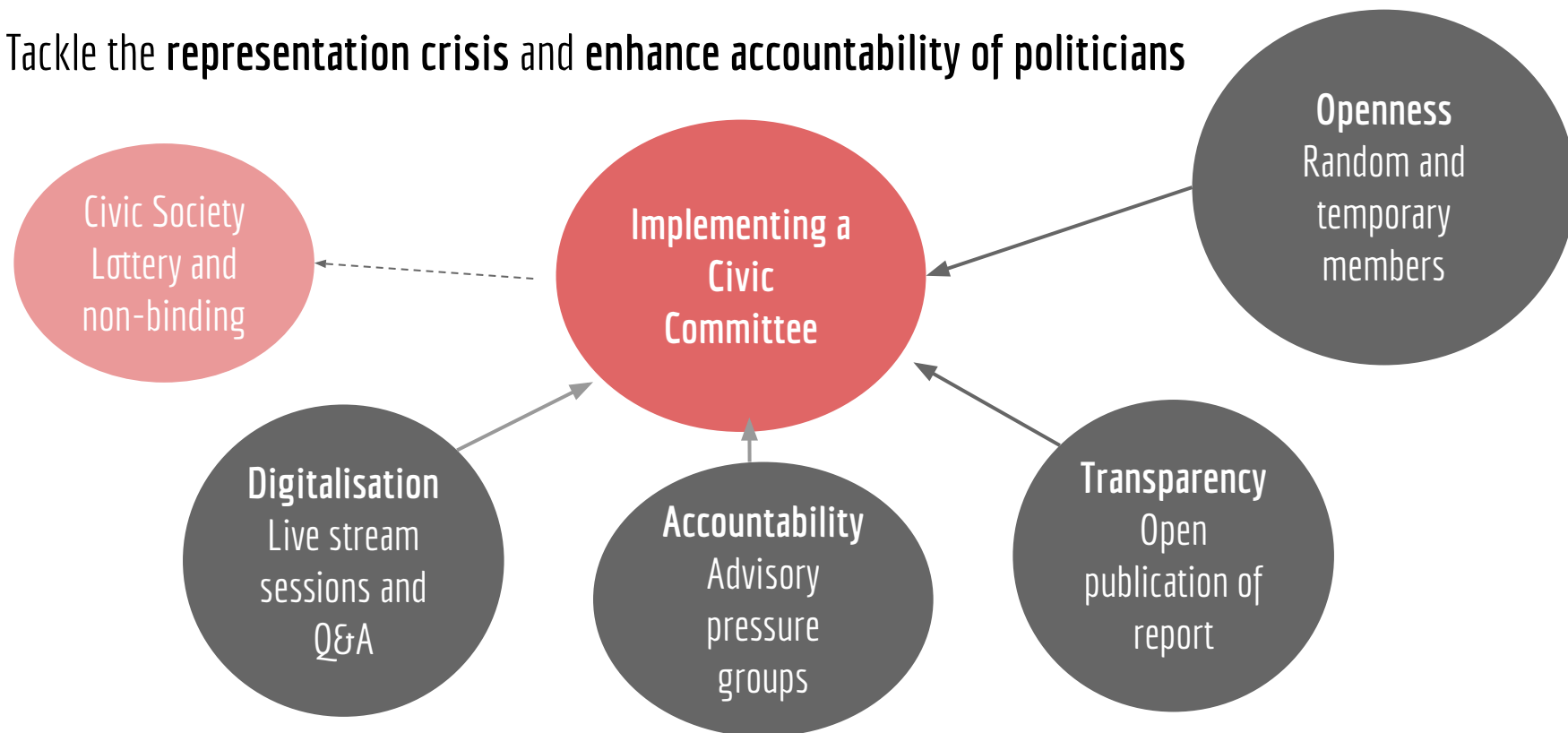


Inclusivity Framework

Ensure assemblies are representative and relevant to local views

Demand 4 : Create Civic Committees

Tackle the **representation crisis** and **enhance accountability** of politicians



Demand 5 : Enforce Human Rights *for Real*

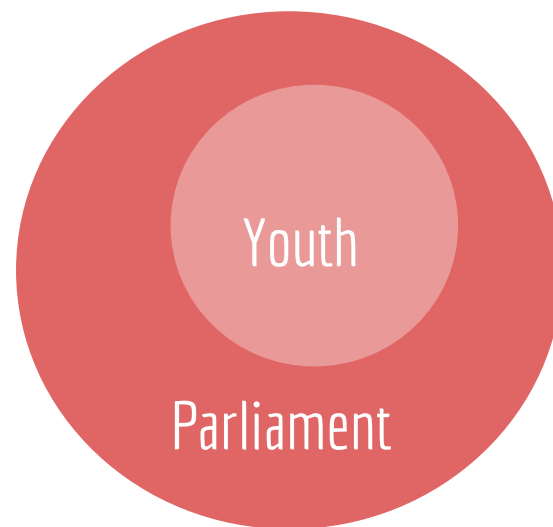
- Act upon the universality of Human Rights
- Hold the international community responsible
- Improve judiciary systems



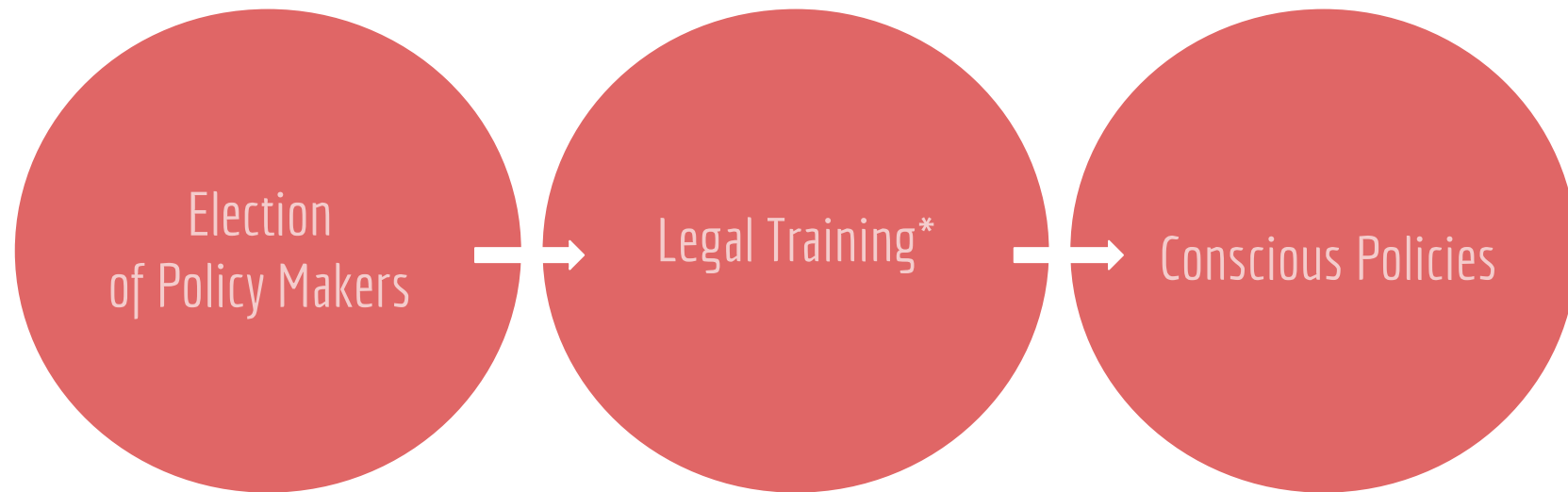
HUMAN RIGHTS are not a matter of question, but a matter of **FACT!**

Demand 6 : Put **Youth** in Charge!

- Mandatory inclusion of Youth in the policy making process
 - Consultations are not enough
 - Youth Quotas in **Parliaments** (50%)
- Including youth in the official representative delegations of all countries to international meetings



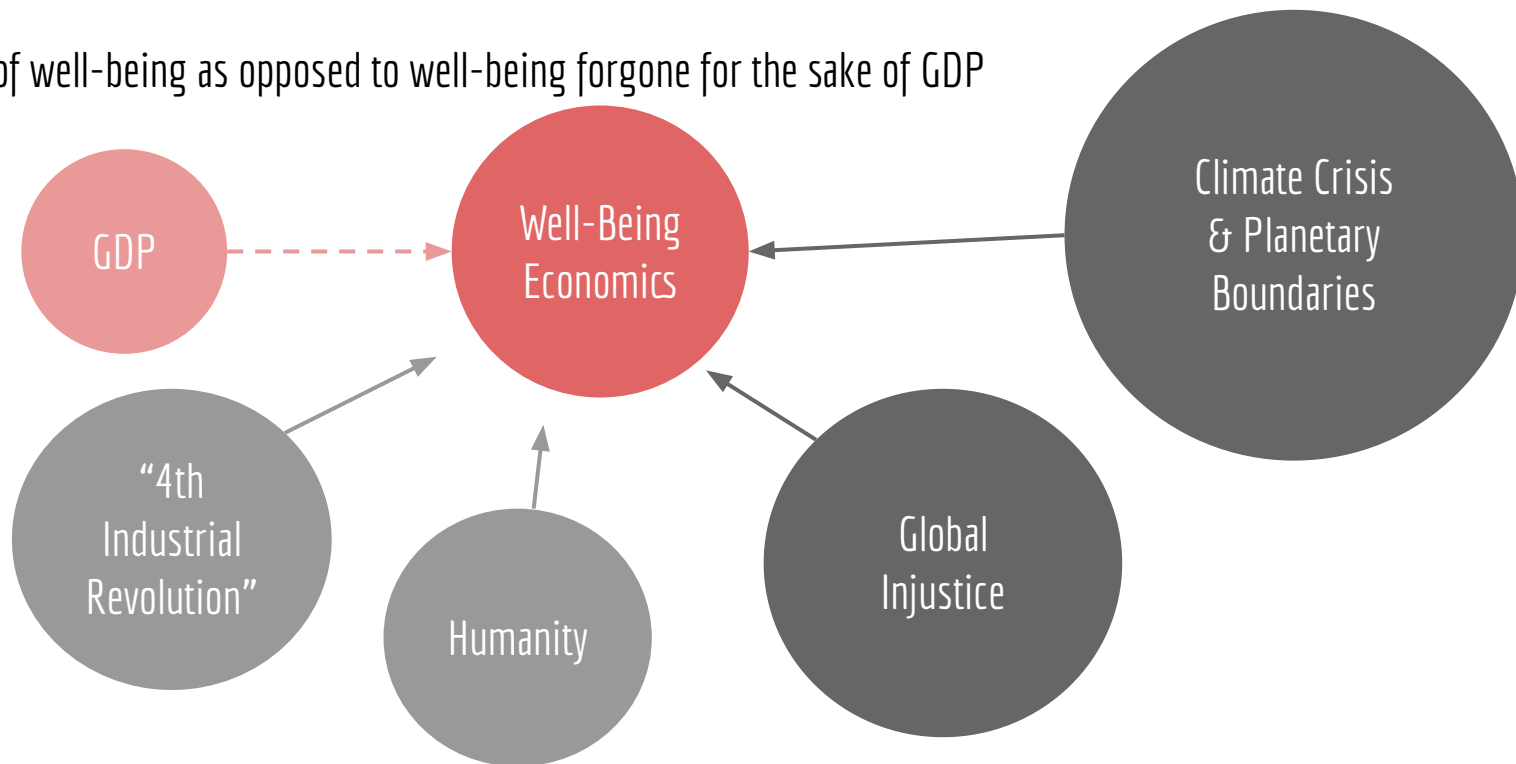
Demand 7: Empower through Legal Knowledge



*** Human Rights; Legal system; Decision-Making Process; Representation Duties; Diplomacy**

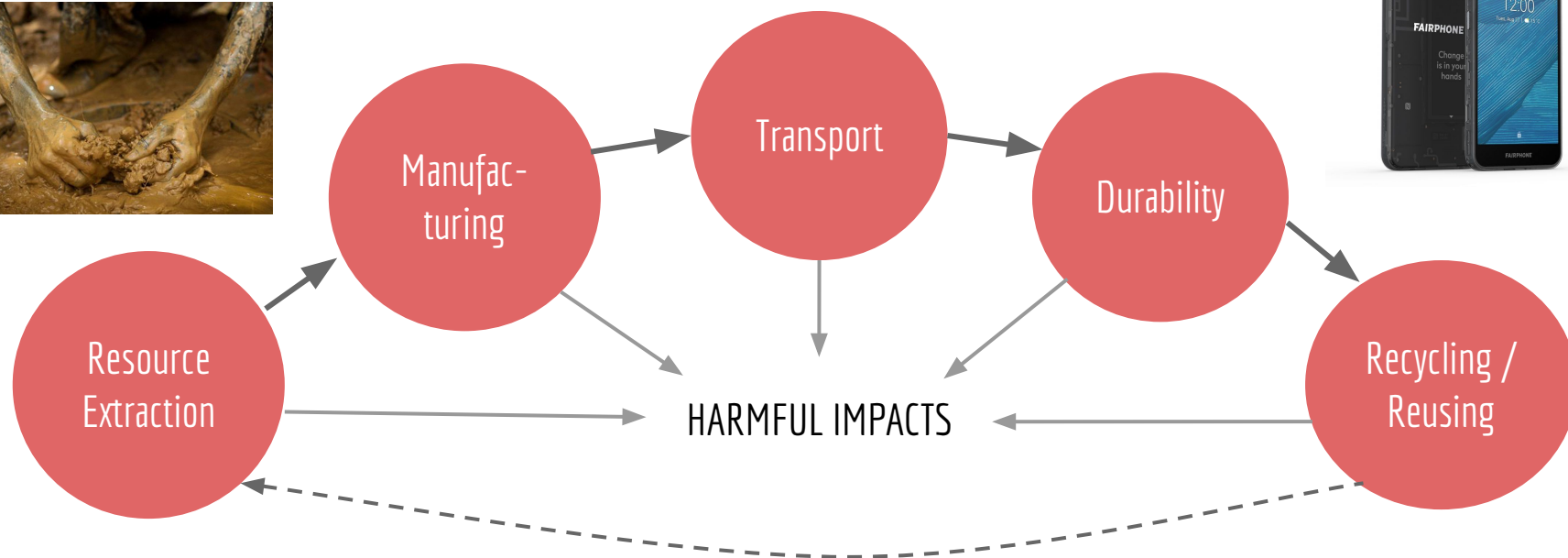
Demand 8 : Repurpose Economics

GDP as a tool of well-being as opposed to well-being forgone for the sake of GDP



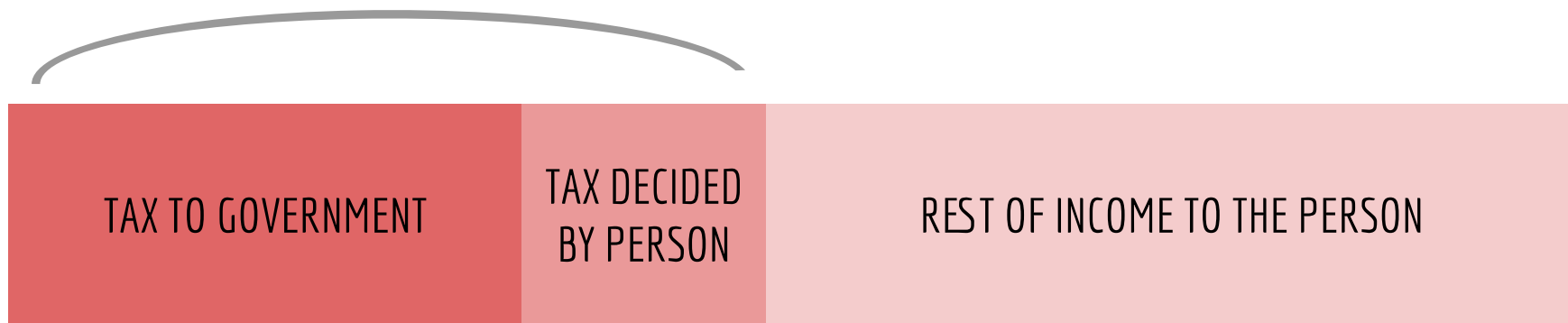
Demand 9 : Reveal Product Supply Chains

AIM: To address the current exploitation of humans and nature



Demand 10 : Democratisise Tax

Original Tax to Government



Read our **Complete Report** for more details!

It will be available tomorrow at
iythinktank.com

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