

INTERNATIONAL **YOUTH** THINK TANK

For Democracy and Against Authoritarianism

Empowerment and Inclusion Through Radical Change

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1. Peaceful Minds, Peaceful Societies

1.1 Recognising and Tackling Intersectional Inequalities in Healthcare

Problem: Intersectional inequalities in health care of marginalised groups from a gender, racial, disability, class, age, rural-urban, and sexual diversity perspective.

Across the globe, we witness distressing inequalities in health care among marginalized groups along the lines of gender, race, disability, class, age, rural-urban dynamics, and sexual diversity. This is a challenge to the values of democracy and social justice as well as to people's effective participation in society. In order for people to be part of a democratic society, they must be healthy: physically, mentally, and socially motivated to be active in the local community. We propose initial solutions that take into account the experiences of marginalised groups in health care, often overlooked in public discourse.

When considering the problem of inequalities in health care, we set out from an intersectional perspective, focusing on the intersection of various social categories. For this reason, we have focused on various marginalised groups whose chances for health and well-being are reduced, e.g. due to class origin, gender, ethnic origin, place of residence. Taking this perspective into account is particularly important due to the increasing polarisation, which in the literature is sometimes referred to as the elevator effect. This term is understood as increasing ("going up") the well-being of each group and community, while not reducing the differences between social strata. Due to the specific nature of the transformations of modern societies, empathic reflection on various challenges of various groups becomes crucial.

It should be emphasised that all proposed solutions should be adapted to the local context. This is due to different needs depending on the region, but also culture, ways of communication, lifestyles, as well as power relations: both at the level of relations within the community (micro), country (macro)

and international relations (mega, e.g. division into central countries, semi-peripheries and peripheries within the so-called neo colonialism or orientalism).

As a solution, we propose the development of two areas: education leading to research, and the implementation of practical solutions affecting every citizen (mainly in the area of diagnostics and treatment) and healthcare professionals.

Proposal

1. The inclusion of the struggles of marginalised groups and their health care needs within

Research & Development and education, for example, by:

- a. Revising training curriculums to include education on inequities and inequalities in health care for marginalised groups (aimed at both healthcare professionals and citizens):
 - cultural-racial sensitivity training;
 - inclusiveness of sex education;
 - LGBTQI+ sensitivity course/training.
- b. Providing cultural competency and sensitivity training to health care professionals, including understanding barriers to health, intercultural communication, reviewing existing policies;
- c. Reworking textbooks in medical care, taking into account different medical needs between people of diverse genders, sexual orientations, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC);

2. **Practical solutions** to issues neglected with marginalised groups to ensure they receive the care and good health that they are entitled to. For example, by:

For society:

- a. Provision of free and regular testing and sanitary products (especially menstrual products to combat menstrual poverty);
- b. Changes in the way medicine is taught and the implementation of medical issues in product design, e.g. taking into account biological differences between men and women or races to increase safety, e.g. in cars, advocacy and inclusion women/lgbtq+ in research and development, recognition of non-white pain and suffering in terms of medical treatment;
- c. Facilitation of access and funding for health care/clinics in more rural, and ethnic areas, supporting the elderly, immobile;
 - i. Organising cars driving around the villages that carry out free tests;
 - ii. Increasing the availability of tests in places where there is no access to clinics and doctors: especially in poor city districts e.g. in work places.

Increasing support for carers, helping those with disabilities and for the elderly: providing more pay, psychological and medical assistance;

Supporting physical activity, including learning how to work with the body and relieve physical tension.

For medical services:

- d. Empowering healthcare workers: providing a “decent pay” and rest time to be empathetic at work;
- e. More accessible and available abortions.

Impact: A fair and just society including more equitable health care for all. Participation in society and enabling democratic processes

1.2 Community Based Mental Health Support

Challenge: Crises affect mental health, lack of formalised clinical care

Nowadays, people are experiencing various crises, from the COVID-19 pandemic, to ongoing conflict and war, and climate change. Crises expose people to a huge amount of stress adversely affecting mental health, both in terms of intergenerational trauma in post-colonial societies general public mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and so forth. At the same time, there is a substantial lack of trained clinical professionals in many countries leading to people suffering silently from possibly debilitating experiences. Poor mental health limits people's quality of life and participation in society and democracy.

Proposal: Psychosocial community-based support groups *incorporating local and indigenous practices.*

We propose to address this important societal challenge through the establishment of community-based psychosocial support groups adapted to local contexts and taking into account local and indigenous practices. These can be focussed, for example, on themes such as grief and loss, the artistic expression of trauma, shared concerns, or neighbourhood collectives. Community-based psychosocial support groups can, for example, be facilitated by students of psychology or social work to employ unused social and human capital. Ultimately, community-based psychosocial support groups must be attentive to the unique objectives, goals, and needs of affected communities.

Impact: Increased access to informal care services, strengthening empathy and societal cohesion

Through these community-based groups, we effectively address general public mental health issues and increase access to informal care services so that no one in society is left behind. An approach, employing the potential of local communities, can also strengthen empathy and societal cohesion and support political participation through healing and enabling voice. We want to stress, however, that, while mental health is an important prerequisite to societal participation, it is not only an instrument to the process of democratisation, but valuable in its own right

1.3 Knowledge Exchange Networks

Challenge: Ineffective crisis response, disconnect between leaders and communities

We consider the way of responding to contemporary crises – such as the open attack of Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, the change of power in Iran – to be one of the most important challenges for democracy. Crises are and will be an inseparable part of modernity, therefore the institutional ability to respond to them, taking into account the democratic voice of the community, is of key importance. Top-down leadership has often provided inadequate solutions to crises as evidenced in the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. This has further alienated individuals from the actual issues at hand, making them feel like politics has failed them.

Hence, we suggest the promotion of bottom-up leadership and community engagement. Political and local leaders must communicate effectively with local communities, but also build a sense of shared responsibility among all citizens.

Proposal: Establishment and promotion of knowledge exchange networks of local grassroots organisations

To combat this, we are recommending the formation of knowledge exchange networks of local grassroots organisations. By sharing experiences and ideas of local communities, potential effective responses to crises can be scaled up to regional or even national levels. Hereby, it is crucial to facilitate communication, for example, through increased telecommunication access as well as transport into less easily accessible areas. By enabling leaders and communities to share local solutions, knowledge exchange networks can increase awareness and accountability to individuals' needs, hence, furthering the democratic process. At the same time, an important goal is to support local leaders, representatives of social organisations, and community members so that they can work together.

1. Amplification of activism and grassroots leadership through the establishment of knowledge

exchange networks of grassroots-level organisations, including:

- a. Sharing resources by exchanging contacts with each other (database) or jointly organised meetings (e.g. how to obtain and settle grants, how to obtain consent to organise events) to make more beneficial use of available knowledge;
 - b. Sharing resources to *all* community members, e.g., on websites;
 - c. Translating materials/resources into local, indigenous languages to open knowledge production and dissemination to up to ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural minorities;
2. Knowledge sharing by increasing telecommunication access, supporting transport for in-person meetings. This may apply to places that do not have developed infrastructure, have limited access to the internet, electricity, and telecommunications network or locations that are less easily accessible for people to leave or move within them (e.g. elderly people, people without a car);
 3. Legal protection of activists and grassroots organisations;
 4. Fostering community engagement and participation:
 - a. by supporting knowledge about the region, supporting local activities enabling meetings of the local community, e.g., organising events teaching the community to stay in the space of cities and villages through joint canoeing, fishing, garbage collection, or physical or artistic work. These events do not have to be related to the hobbies of the citizens concerned, but are aimed at building bonds with the place and with the community through everyday activities;
 - b. by getting to know local tradition, culture, communities and activists;
 - c. by creating urban spaces conducive to local activity, e.g. common squares, places to work in public space, being more accountable to the population.

Impact: Promotion of bottom-up leadership and support of local engagement and activism.

Local leaders who have more empathy for local issues will therefore take more effective action, making the public feel more rewarded by the democratic process. Not only this but if leaders are more connected to the community, activism can have a louder voice and can be elevated to a national level by effective representatives.

Conclusion: We believe we need a complete overhaul of the healthcare system to convert it to a more ethical and equal operation for everyone. By promoting inclusion and equitability, we can promote and develop existing social infrastructure to work for everyone. Although some of the changes will take a generation to enact, we have set out plausible local level initiatives to inspire the younger generation to participate more actively in democracy. When people see the progress and impact they are having, they are motivated to continue and bring more value to their community. We hope that by removing inequalities and improving our general wellbeing, our positive mindsets will be paramount to helping democracy.

2. Engaged Citizens, Active Citizens

It has been established that a variety of threatening forces have come to compromise democracy and the smooth running of its healthy operations in recent years. The damaging effects of polarisation are felt throughout democratic societies. Polarisation is motivated by a distrust of traditional parties in favour of divisive populist figures. It not only puts the democratic process at risk by damaging the relationship between the citizens and the state, but also poisons interpersonal relationships and interactions among citizens themselves. Polarisation, which is caused by distrust, fuels more distrust, in what becomes a self-perpetuating vicious cycle.

We turned to our life experiences to devise solutions to effectively counteract democratic challenges. We found that, by constantly uniting and pursuing activities in common, we become aware of the interests we share with others. We are convinced that through the art of association, through community, people recognize the influence their behaviour has on those they interact with. Through association people develop a bond of reciprocal obligation towards one another as well as towards the institution they engage with. This reciprocal obligation entails mutual trust.

Our proposals set out to encourage civic virtuous acts that are functional to the promotion of democratic values. High levels of civic engagement are correlated with greater feelings of happiness and trust.¹ This is based on the idea that people's wellbeing is a product of social cooperation. Civic engagement effectively counteracts the sense of general distrust by facilitating a sense of mutuality by citizens towards institutions (vertical level) as well as amongst citizens themselves (horizontal level). It also contrasts a sense of apathy fueled by alienation by way of making citizens main characters of the democratic process.

¹ <https://www.thepolicycircle.org/brief/whats-whys-civic-engagement/>

2.1 Regional Critical Education in Schools

Challenges: Apathy, Inequality, Polarisation, Distrust.

Polarised viewpoints come from a lack of critical thought, which clearly become the biggest threat to authoritarian regimes. Critical thinking as we understood it, is a democratic learning process examining power relations and social inequities.² We have however identified that, though some education systems include it in their curricula from a young age, critical thinking is often only introduced during secondary/academic studies. Before then, students are taught they must learn one specific view that will then be the one they are asked. We strongly oppose this approach as it pushes for young citizens that do not question their reality and limit their ideas to those they know. This is what we believe fuel polarised societies.

Proposal: We propose introducing critical thinking programmes in school from the primary school level until secondary school to develop critical thinkers who will be engaged participants in a democracy.³ Our policy would see a critical thinking class, possibly once per week, being introduced from the very first stages of education. Being inspired by critical pedagogies theories tied to social justice and democracy and by stimulating creativity through arts, music, plays etc., children would start by learning to identify and understand the existence of diversities and similarities, awakening their critical consciousness and awareness. Only as the students go through their education cycles will concepts such as critical race, feminist, queer, critical legal and postcolonial theories, how they interact and their contemporary influence, be introduced. In order for the program to be efficient, the topics covered would have to be understood within specific social/political/cultural dynamics, shifting our main focus from a global to local level.

Impact: We aim at creating a safe and open environment in which teachers help and enable students to develop their own ideas. It is not to support and promote one specific view, but exposing them to various perspectives upon which they can construe their citizenship and identity. In the long run, this creates a community that is able to assess and critically analyse the facts and political concerns of the “grown-ups” world. We think polarisation is a result of the inability of recognizing and accepting differences, limiting one’s

² Sarah Benesch, “Critical Thinking: A Learning Process for Democracy.” *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1993, pp. 545–48. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587485>. Accessed 23 Nov. 2022.

³ Jesse Gainer, “Critical thinking: Foundational for digital literacies and democracy.” *Journal of adolescent & adult literacy* 56.1 (2012): 14-17

opinions to the general sentiment. By exposing children to different standpoints from a young age, they would grow into citizens who are able to question what they are told and taught, becoming more aware of injustices and capable of resonating with them. Allow and encourage dissent, debate and dialogue for a more understanding and conscious community.

Recognizing major issues:

- **Opposition from religious/cultural groups:**

Providing multilateral perspectives and critical religious education will be useful in addressing the problem. The aim of the proposal is precisely that of not giving a unique perspective of major issues, but providing different point of views that can inspire new and personal thoughts to be shared in an open environment.

- **How can it be applied globally?**

The policy would tie the topics and curricula to the local dimension. The focus would be directed to the history, state of politics, state of policies that are true for a given society, excluding a 'universal' curriculum that would not be feasible. i.e.: The ideas discussed in European countries may not be relevant to South Asian countries.

- **What about the teachers?**

The education system would have to ensure the faculty is educated in critical theories and pedagogies and has the depth of information and competences that such critical social issues warrant. From the experience of existing critical theories classes existing in different countries, one of the biggest issues is the possible bias of teachers. This undoubtedly remains an issue which is the reason why the education system requires radical change. The positive impact could be observed in the long run, when a new community of socially aware citizens recognize the importance of providing this "destabilising" approach to teaching. Nonetheless, the policy could be introduced in specific (maybe non-governmental schools) schools before applying it at national level.

- **Funding:**

Programmes, especially educational programmes, require intense research and investment in time and money. Monetary funding is a likely issue. We concluded that there are a range of free resources that can be accessed online which prove to be a useful guide to developing critical pedagogies and critical learning programmes. A 'resource bank' of sorts could be developed with free material that can be accessed by schools for an effective first step, although some sort of funding and focused research would be required to implement the policy.

2.2 Compulsory paid community work providing public services

Challenge: Apathy, community cohesion, understanding inclusion, democratic value appreciation

Recognizing the need for a cohesive society, compulsory paid community work aims at developing knowledge, skills and values with which socially responsible students can contribute meaningfully to the society. Parallely, it provides young students with a set of skills they would learn by providing services to their communities.

In this line of thought, our understanding of apathy is tied to the overarching indifference that belongs to many people in society. On the one hand, we consider the apathy of those who are privileged, often not involved in the more practical and concrete issues of communities. Young people would therefore have a hands-on approach to the issues, while still being assisted by experienced workers. On the other hand, we recognized the need for a more empathetic society. When being confronted with the challenges of such essential yet undervalued jobs, one learns to resonate with different realities and experiences.

Proposal: Compulsory paid work for 16-25 year olds providing public services in areas including but not restricted to services such as healthcare, policing, homelessness, maintenance will foster empathy and counter apathy. This will be done due to two key elements in this scheme: first working alongside an undervalued but key workforce transcends age, social-economic, racial, ethnic, gendered boundaries, second because by being involved in the provision of public services exposes young people to vulnerable sectors of society giving a feeling of self-worth and appreciation of the public services which are provided by modern democracies.

This would take place from the age of 16 and work alongside education systems in country specific contexts. This would take place for 2 years as a sufficient time to foster community bonds. Providing public services in and around the local community. The wage will be standardised, while the purpose will be to inculcate respect and responsibility in adolescents while obtaining useful life experience. The decision of the job role appropriate to the student will be at the discretion of a newly appointed position who is situated at schools but is strongly connected to the local councils and community. The intention is to foster awareness and create an inclusive community which would be achieved by exposing students to environments they would not necessarily encounter otherwise. This position will be ingrained deeply within pastoral services within education systems to have a deep understanding of students. A byproduct of this will be a greater connection between community and local education services. The impact this will have on the organisations providing public services will be a

widening of the workforce, an increased responsibility and pay to mentors/ buddies who work alongside the students increasing self worth in lower strata of organisations. The scope of the proposal is facilitated by the creation of a regional organisation board that could coordinate with other regional boards who on the national and then regional level can share practice/ understanding.

Impact: To foster community by 1) facilitating interaction between young people and the workforce creating an understanding of what work goes into making democracies a nice place to live through the provision of public good 2) by facilitating interaction between different ages, social-economic backgrounds, racial and ethnic backgrounds within these work hierarchies creating community and empathy 3) exposing young people to vulnerable groups within society who are impacted most by democratic decisions creating empathy 4) appreciation of non/"less" academically skilled workforce making a more inclusive society.

Recognizing major issues:

- **Compulsory issue:**

Levels of apathy and disinterest are some of the major issues that are rapidly eroding democracies. Introducing radical policies from a young age would increase the younger generations' civic responsibility and awareness which would undoubtedly address the key challenges we have recognized within our society. Its provocative compulsory nature would be justified when considering the scheme is incorporated within the education system.

- **Limits of age:**

The policy was envisioned to target secondary school students, beginning with 16 year olds. The idea behind this is to counter apathy from the root. When facing communities' realities directly, young people would develop social conscience, a sense of belonging to their community alongside providing the practical knowledge such experiences provide. Nonetheless, the policy would have to be flexible enough to adapt case-to-case, taking into consideration country specific education systems, wage policies etc.

- **What work to be included? / Which student carries out what work?**

In practice, a new role would have to be established in schools in order to facilitate the connection between the education system (school, college, university) and the community and public good which needs to be provided. Moreover, they necessarily would have to take up a supervisory role to assist students throughout their community work engagements. Recognizing the complexities and sensitivities of the areas young people are involved in (specifically work with the elderly, mental health care services, hospital porting, community

policing, public maintenance, social services support etc.), attention should be drawn to their specificities, for example, work with children would have to tackle issues of attachment.

- **Duke of Edinburgh (UK Scheme):**

This was suggested as a similar system, however we believe this policy would differ significantly. First, the Duke of Edinburgh connection to the royal family gives connotations which relate to certain class and race. Second, it does not provide monetary incentives which our policy requires. From a young age, young people would learn to support themselves at the same time it would help people in disadvantageous situations. Lastly, through our policy, young people would be involved in providing services that the community requires. We believe this is key to seeing, experiencing and learning the value of democratic institutions.

- **How does it fit into the workload of school education?**

In countries like Germany, which is a great example of an active community, students are allowed to work a maximum of 20 hours a week, while successfully following their education. Thus, it is not necessary that pupils will be obliged to work every day or do an excessive amount of time. The proposal is flexible in that regard and allows people to take into consideration weekends or afternoons, as the most important thing remains dedication to something that matters. Consequently, contribution to society could be dispersed in a couple of 2-3 hour shifts, as the main focus is boosting community cohesion by tackling indifference.

- **Funding**

We feel that this issue is positively correlated with the previous one. How? The excessive workload that already is implemented in the school curriculum limits the number of hours that adolescents can work. This flexibility on the other hand allows employers (government institutions, private companies, NGOs etc) to cover a standardised wage, which is significantly smaller than the one of full-time workers. Thus, a probable confrontation with regards to the financial part becomes less likely. Furthermore, firms or institutions participate in preparing future generations to be a beneficial part of society at a low cost, while young people obtain unmatched experience along with a financial stimulus that keeps them on track. Both parties get to share the moral high ground at a reasonable price - a bit of time and money.

2.3 Community building and association through sports

Challenge: distrust, which is fuel to the fire that is polarisation.

Counteracting distrust on two levels: a vertical one (citizens- institutions) and a horizontal one (amongst citizens themselves).

Proposal: Sports is a transversal means of aggregation, especially for the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups. Based on the formula “palestre popolari” (“the people’s gyms”) in Italy. Twofold action:

1. Stepping in to guarantee accessibility to sports by creating venues, facilities, and courses that are either totally free or reduced fee (you pay as much as you can). Focus on group sports. Creating popular, state-funded sports associations that are not subjected to market volatility and prices.
2. Foraging and grassroots sports associations already in place by providing funding given that these comply with requirements – non-discrimination upon entry, etc. Facilitating already-existing virtuous associations.

The scope of the proposal interests peripheral, marginalised areas. The target is any and all people in the community (youngsters to elders) wishing to partake in sports, potentially providing an opportunity for converging different age groups.

Impact: Sports as a tool for community building and association is implemented in Sweden, for example. We are taking the best of this intuition and elevating it to achieve the goal of building trust within the community by means of association. The proposal sets out to address a need (for community, a sense of belonging, physical activity) that becomes a state-given right by encouraging civic virtuous behaviours directly and indirectly (through sports itself and the satisfaction of non-discrimination requirements).

Recognizing major issues:

- ***Issue of violence and criminality amongst marginalised groups***

The crime among underrepresented populations argument is worth mentioning, but it is not a cause to dismiss our proposal. A same argument may be made about prisons, which shelter individuals from all walks of life yet are nonetheless subsidised. Why don't we reduce criminality before the courtroom and the prison walls by allowing people to participate in various forms of physical activities that will unite even the most stunted criminals on the axis of passion? In order to make our point, we will use one of the most heinous crimes, war. Back in 1914, at the height of the First World War, the adversaries agreed to a one-day truce on Mount Christmas by playing football. Even the most harsh critic is capable of observing a moment of silence in appreciation of the majesty of the example.

- ***Role of parents that get involved but do not have the venues to carry out their citizenry***

An extremely useful criticism that allows us to say something highlighted in our meetings and report, namely that the provision of a field for action also allows the organisation of mini-amateur championships in various disciplines, which can be observed in countries such as England, for example. Whereas if we look at football, the teams have an extremely huge influence on the respective regional communities. The role of parents comes right here, because if we assume that most of the participants are young, then inevitably they need guidance and a training process that can be guided/observed by keen and active parents, as if we say that they are busy with work, which is a worthy argument, then what could be better than spending part of the weekend with your son and daughter preparing for a sports event such as a match, etc. Everyone benefits from joining a cause, and most importantly, experience mingling with youth united by a common goal other than the criminal temptations of the streets.

Conclusion

The word democracy comes from the Greek words ‘demos’, meaning people, and ‘kratos’ meaning power. In a fragmented society torn by distrust and cynical apathy, our initiatives, based on the concept of democracy, restore power to the people by urging them to act. Criticism is just as important as praise, if not more so. With that being said, not only do we accept it, but we also encourage it. Criticisms that our suggestions will confront challenges such as segregation, lack of specificity, and inefficiency – and fail, are met with the response that, in the process of developing the recommendations, we as a team have effectively overcome these very criticisms in the cause of the common good. If we, a handful of strangers and completely different people, succeeded in a spontaneous outburst of ideas, disagreements, and a race against time, then others will inevitably triumph as well. Why? Because we are the others, the ones who, for better or worse, construct this community. We establish a safe place to exist and safeguard the ideas that make us, the participants of IYTT, feel privileged by fostering critical thinking, a sense of responsibility, and belonging. Our proposals establish a culture of developing the democratic muscles that, in their service to society, allow us to call ourselves free people.

3. Rethinking Democracy

3.1 Council for the Future

Introduction

At the moment many people feel a growing gap between politicians and citizens. An advisory citizen's assembly can help re-establish trust and re-focus politics on citizen's long-term concerns. Empowering citizens to formally voice their views on policies and how policies touch upon their long-term concerns can lead to citizen's cherishing democracy again. It can also help to bring citizens together – citizens that rarely interact in societies increasingly polarised.

Challenges

We see more and more democracy experiencing a backlash to authoritarianism.

In a world of declining democracy and the rise of political polarisation, a complex interplay of socio-economic, political, and cultural factors result in inadequate representation of citizens in politics. While political inclusion is vital to sustain democracy, systemic and legal barriers to political participation persist at all levels resulting in challenges relating to the capacity of government responding to people's different needs.

To overcome unequal opportunities for political participation and make citizen's long-term concerns heard in policymaking circles, we must open up to new forms of political participation. That is why we urgently need a Council for the Future.

Solution

We propose the establishment of citizens' assemblies, entitled 'Councils for the Future'.

They could bridge the gap between institutions and citizens. The citizens in the Council for the Future should represent the society's diversity. Therefore the participants could be chosen based on demographic factors. People who are underrepresented in politics at the moment like people of younger age, women, non-binary people or indigenous peoples, would then be favoured. However, the council should be accessible for every person that wants to be part of it. To fit both needs there could be a quota for people selected on demographic factors and a spot for voluntary people. For example in a council of 50 persons: 30 could be selected on demographic factors and 20 people could consist completely of voluntary persons. The council is aimed at people who are not yet engaged in politics.

Regional moderators synthesise local advisory reports and send them to the national citizen's councils. Meetings of the national citizen's council must be chaired by ministers that are dealing with the policy areas addressed. It will help expand governmental collaboration to other related ministries or departments.

In the council, citizens get the opportunity to be active in politics without the burdensome responsibilities that accompany a usual politician's life. As they do not need to be elected again, the advice they provide is probably more focused on their own experiences and opinions, rather than what could be the most popular opinion. This leads to better policies and more trust in democracy.

Conclusion

To conclude, while we think that the Council for the Future could significantly contribute to empowering citizens and giving long-term considerations more weight, there are some limitations that need to be considered. An important limitation is that it is not necessarily given that chosen citizens will have a mind that is focused on long-term issues as opposed to short-term considerations, such as cheaper bills. However, we expect that their role as guardians of the future will encourage long-term thinking among chosen individuals. Therefore, the Council for the Future gives more people the opportunity to participate in politics.

3.2 The Grant for Change

Introduction

Being a political candidate is hard work. You need a lot of skills, must be well-known and you need loads of money. As we want everybody to be able to become a member of a parliament, we need a pool of money to support candidates that lack the above resources. The idea of our grant is to support marginalised people to cross the preliminary stage to get into politics.

Challenges

Financial burdens limit people's ability to become active in politics. A particularly striking problem that continues to limit the means through which individuals are able to interact with both local and national political systems lies in the constraints posed upon them by financial burdens. With the increasing tendency for governments to extend the periods of time during which elections take place, this establishes a profound economic cost upon representatives, regardless of political affiliation, that they must compensate for using their own economic resources. Due to the systemic economic differences prevalent within society, these restrictions to participation particularly affect marginalised groups within politics. Given the responsibility of care is often located upon women, and that the capacity for involvement amongst working classes within politics is constrained by the balancing between sustaining oneself and active participation, a troubling precedent is set in which only certain demographics can continually participate in political campaigns. This thus leaves us with a condition in which certain groups become apathetic to the overall conditions of their country, believing their role to be negligible in the fomentation of a secure state that works to their benefit. In many countries, fewer now think, the state is run for the benefit of all. For example, according to the Pew Research Center's 'global attitudes survey', in 2019 only 49 of the respondents thought that the state is run for the benefit of all the people. Astoundingly, 64 percent of the respondents believed that elected officials do not care about what people like them think⁴.

The current system is predicated upon allying oneself to political parties to get elected, as these are the only bodies that can provide some form of limited funding. This is nevertheless rather problematic, as one becomes wholly dependent upon an ideological institution to sustain democracy, which hinders constructive dissent within the party from taking place due to the chokehold the parties have over the candidates that can run for them during elections. Given the economic costs of running, without the support of parties, it is particularly challenging for new individuals to break through into politics. Overall, the consequence of this is that the overall diversity within parliament is throttled, which hinders the motivation for new individuals to enter into

⁴ See:
<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/02/27/democratic-rights-popular-globally-but-commitment-to-them-not-always-strong/>
[23.11.2022].

politics. This obviously leads to the question: how can we resolve the financial hurdle that prevents the greater representation of voices within democratic systems? Diversity matters in our politics and a lack of that prevents progressive political ambition.

The consequence of this is that individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, or those with care-giver roles, would find it particularly challenging to participate within political systems when there are greater financial burdens upon their lives. That is why we urgently need to remove the financial hurdles to political participation by giving life to an empowering political action fund.

People with less financial resources get the opportunity to become a politician. The persons the grant is aimed at have less income but great knowledge, huge experiences and fresh ideas for politics. They want to be part of politics, but do not know how. They do not get support from their family or friends and their budget is tight. They do services to the public through their job or in their free time. They have the ideas, the knowledge, all they need is somebody who trusts them and gives them financial support. With the Candidate innovation fund, they can evolve their full potential and make the world a better place.

At the moment, having good ideas is not enough to become a politician. Politicians have donors or a party that gives them money. Politicians are depending on their donors. This has led to a lack of representation of people who do not have the financial resources needed. A lack of diversity in parliament is bad for sustaining our democracy. We need all the ideas there are to be in the parliament as well. To face our crisis, we need everybody working together beyond political differences.

Solution

We propose the Grant for Change to fund candidates with lower financial resources. The grant works as shown in figure 1. First, people apply and give evidence of their financial situation and provide the number of signatures they have gathered. The signatures are necessary to make sure that we only support people who are really willing to run for parliament and have a certain support base to start with. Thus, our grant does not automatically give every individual the chance to get into politics, but only those who put a significant effort into garnering political support. The grant serves to enhance political participation and diversity in politics, irrespective of political views. The anonymous applications are checked by a digital system which in certain instances is complemented by a committee to determine applicants which are more in need of empowerment. The chosen applicants receive money for campaign financing and for living costs.

The Grant for Change

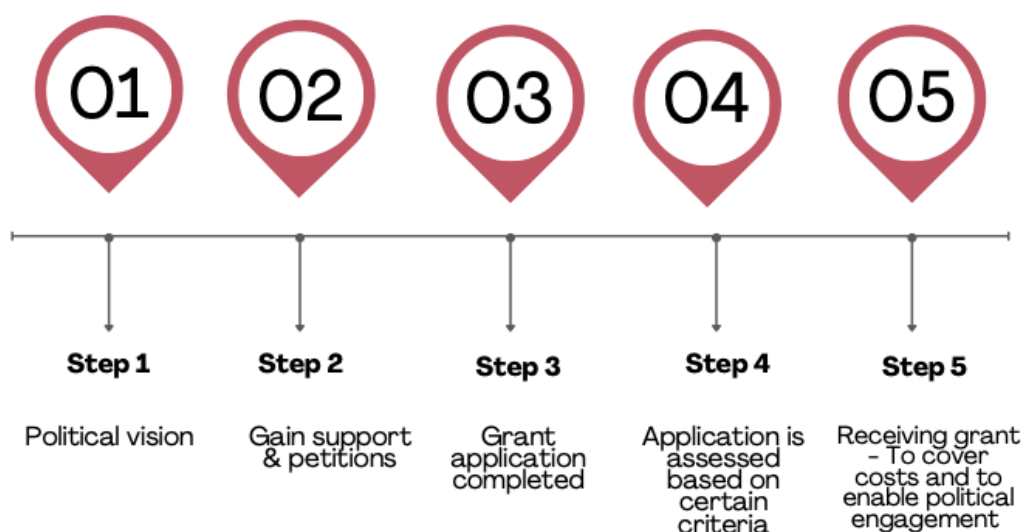


Figure 1: The process for receiving the grant

The grant system gives people the opportunity to get into a parliament. It gives people the freedom to openly speak their minds because they are not dependent on somebody for support. Without the socio-economic barriers, getting access to politics becomes easier. If more people get the chance to become a member of parliament, there will be more innovative, diverse and fresh ideas in parliament. Fresh ideas lead to better policies and laws because more perspectives are considered. When individuals of demographic groups that are currently not involved in politics get involved, whole demographic groups will feel more satisfied and represented as their needs are more deeply and accurately addressed in the parliament. Thus, democracy is strengthened. More people will get interested in politics because it will no longer be something only for privileged people with no worries about money but something that is open for everybody and responsive to everybody – irrespective of socio-economic factors.

Conclusion

This Grant for Change gives more people the opportunity to get into politics. Politicians have more freedom to speak their mind in parliament because they are not dependent on somebody's goodwill. Easier access to politics means that more people are interested in politics. More perspectives in parliament means better laws. The Grant for Change is an essential part in strengthening our democracy.

4. Common Good Economy

We live in a society that believes growth to be the pinnacle of human achievement yet this interminable striving for production has instead poisoned our society with severe social and economic issues. Unlimited growth destroys limited systems, exacerbating undemocratic sentiment and inequality. Productivism and consumerism have been contributing to the deterioration of democracy by enhancing differences among individuals ruthlessly depleting resources.

Democracy has long been associated with rapid economic growth and development which has pushed humanity towards prioritising increased production and consumption. However, the reinforcement of neoliberal policies focused on economic growth measured purely by indicators including GDP has only exacerbated socio-economic issues including inequalities. Social cohesion being a crucial indicator of healthy democratic development of the state is, therefore undermined by increasing polarisation and inefficiently addressed welfare policies. Scarce access to healthcare and education together with many other emerging factors upon which well-being is dependent, keep shattering people's trust and loyalty regarding the viability of democratic institutions. With this in mind, there is a need to reconceptualize and alter current economic structures by not viewing economic success as a determinant of prosperity and instead placing well-being at the forefront of development. Bridging social and economic differences among different layers of society can be reached through enhanced well-being whereby individuals are not exposed to the multitude of struggles caused by ineffectively functioning public institutions and the constant pressure of perpetual production. On top of that, in a political society democracy forms an essential aspect of well-being in allowing individuals to manifest their involvement in a community through active participation thus overcoming the feeling of disconnection.

Aforementioned detrimental effects emphasise the need to rethink the concept of growth that is frequently believed to go in line with progress, and incorporate the degrowth model in analytical frameworks, as a revolutionary alternative to the current system. Essentially, degrowth implies shifting away from treating

growth using merely economic metrics like GDP and placing importance on social and environmental paradigm. The objectives thus are shifted towards ensuring social well-being which in turn will contribute to overall prosperity.

A New Needs Based Measurement of Well-Being

We developed an econometric model which aims at formulating a new measurement of value within this alternative economic framework. This analysis will enable policy-makers to periodically evaluate individuals' well-being and, at the same time, monitor the impact of our economic policy proposals.

For the purpose of this model, data will be collected regionally through surveys every six months and respondents will be asked to answer a number of questions to quantify well-being. The regression serves both a positive and normative purpose, estimating on the one hand welfare discrepancies across various societal groups and, on the other, it serves as a basis to advise governments on effective fiscal policy.

The estimated regression model is the following:

$$wellbeing_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 age_{it} + \beta_2 gender_{it} + \beta_3 race + \beta_4 income_{it} + \beta_5 income_{it}^2 + \beta_6 inequality_{it} + \gamma X' + \xi Y'$$

Where wellbeing is an aggregate measure of the individuals' welfare estimated by merging more specific disaggregated variables. Variables measuring respondents' wellbeing include a set of indicators that will then be aggregated in the final index.

The survey will be organised into five main sections:

- Economic sufficiency and stability
 - To what extent are your basic survival needs met?
 - Does your current financial situation hinder your overall prosperity?
- Access to Education
 - Do you consider your access to education to be challenging or scarce?
 - Does your access to education affect your satisfaction with life?
- Physical and Mental Health
 - Do you feel there are strong barriers to healthcare access?
 - Does this lack of access result in a poorer quality of life? (rate on the scale)
- Environmental situation
 - Does the current environmental situation in your region concern you?
 - To what extent these concerns negatively affect your well being?
- Safety
 - Do you feel safe in the area/ neighbourhood you live in?
 - Does this sense of (un)safety affect your well being ?

The variables age, gender, and race were introduced in the model to capture wellbeing differentials across society.

gender is a binary variable assuming value 1 if the individual is female and 0 otherwise, therefore, β_2 coefficient quantifies how wellbeing is higher or lower for females compared to males. The same reasoning applies to coefficients β_1 and β_3 which instead capture wellbeing differential across different ethnicities and age classes.

To include nonlinear returns to income on wellbeing, both *income* and *income*² were included in the model. The Easterlin Paradox is thus captured by coefficients β_4 and β_5 which measure how once a certain level of income is met, individuals reach a “satiation point” and income no longer has a positive correlation with happiness levels. As a consequence, we are expecting to find positive and negative estimates for β_4 and β_5 respectively. The variable inequality was introduced in the regression to capture the impact that inequality has on wellbeing and is calculated as the difference between an individual’s income and the average income of the richest decile of the distribution.

Factor X is fundamental to the normative purpose of the model, it is a matrix containing variables for all the services we aim at directing our public spending towards, including education, safety, health, transportation, social welfare and environment.

Factor Y is a matrix containing well-being measurements, variables expressing individuals’ perceptions of economic sufficiency and stability, access to education, physical and mental health, safety and the environmental situation in their region or country.

Community Centred Decision Making: ‘Factor X’

In order to express the functionality of our measurement system, it is necessary to explain the practical basis of Factor ‘X’ as well as examples that serve to demonstrate the viability of such a proposal.

Fundamentally, factor ‘X’ is a form of direct democracy through a regular feedback loop, that ascertains the specific needs and desires, essentially the priorities, of the population relative to various spending areas. It would be done through a regular, regional survey that would suggest a variety of spending areas, asking the population to quantify each proposal in terms of importance to them in relation to wellbeing on a numerical scale. This allows a non-linear ranking system thus allowing for the prioritisation of multiple interlinked areas

whilst also avoiding a situation whereby important factors are completely ignored out of a feeling that certain areas should necessarily be given low scores to contrast high scores in other areas.

This would be distributed by regional authorities, allowing for specific local issues and combinations of priorities that may otherwise be forgotten in a large-scale system that prioritises the tyranny of the majority thereby ensuring equality and allowing for a fundamental redistribution of power and control over politics. Furthering the practical aspect of this proposal, this would be neither monetarily compensated nor mandatory, instead focusing on the principle of procedural fairness, that the demos is more receptive to policies, even those they don't agree with, when they feel they have a say in the process and can therefore feel the tangible action of democracy. This is essential in building a democratic culture that identifies itself, regionally and nationally with the importance of their voice thus perpetuating and expanding democratic sentiment and strength to those who otherwise feel unheard. This is further strengthened by the feedback loop element of a measure which ensures that not only are such surveys advisory but intrinsically and necessarily implemented thereby assuring that democratic apathy can be successfully challenged.

In regards to practical examples to demonstrate the viability of such a system, this system is originally based upon the Internet-based participatory planning system implemented in Kabul between 2019 and 2021. This system used digital surveys to ascertain the opinion of citizens in regards to infrastructure decisions and to directly involve the needs and opinions of the local population in the issues that affected them the most. During the period from 2019 to the fall of Kabul in 2021, this system saw opinions from over 15,000 different citizens providing 75,000 different opinions, informing over 300 decisions. Whilst unfortunately this system, which is fundamentally an attempt to engender democratic ideals and build democratic culture in Kabul, is under threat from the Taliban takeover and equally has its limitations regarding digital access, as a preliminary concept it is certainly impressive, therefore demonstrating the viability of such a system on an expanded scale.

Implementation Through Contributions and Benefits

This normative goal would be realised through a radically new approach to spending and taxes. Yet there is a prior question of framing that needs to be addressed. In the common imagination, both that of the most and least economically advantaged in society, taxation is often viewed as a punishment, imposed upon the populous and misused to favour the powerful. Equally, spending, and especially the concept of benefits, has been misconstrued as a hand out for those who are reluctant to contribute to society. These conceptions have come into being as the result of divisive, authoritarian ideology championing an extreme individualism that pits communities against each other. As a counter, our proposal seeks to reframe spending and taxes through the lens of contributions and welfare. This would imply that taxation, rather than being a punishment, is an opportunity for those most fortunate in society to easily contribute. Rather than taking away from the individual, it is giving to society. Equally, spending and benefits, reframed as welfare would recentre the purpose of government spending as being fundamental for the well-being of the populace, removing the stigma and embarrassment surrounding users of the benefits system as recipients of a fundamental component of governance rather than a societal exception.

This would be further redressed by the introduction of a universal basic income seeking to provide a minimum economic capacity for all people within a nation. A system centred around capital accumulation and incessant production views citizens as economic units; their value determined by that which they produce economically. Fundamentally, this is an un-human system, ignorant of the value we bring to a society outside of our traditionally productive capacities. As such, within the context of a common good economy, a universal basic income is necessary to ensure freedom for all people to explore and pursue their own and their community's well-being, whilst diversifying their democratic culture, without the constant pressure brought about by a production-centric system. Furthermore, this allows the most vulnerable individuals in our society, those who are not necessarily capable of adhering to the strict standard of what is traditionally productive, to thrive as communal creatures. Equally, the 'universal' aspect of a universal basic income serves to eliminate the stigma

faced by those who benefit from traditional welfare models; as all people will benefit from such a policy, there is a universal experience within society and as such a universal desire to protect such a system for the benefit of all strata of society. Essentially, a universal basic income allows us to act as human beings, as opposed to merely productive beings, enslaved to a fundamentally discriminatory system.

Addressing the conception of taxation as a punishment is equally pertinent to this entire system. The surveys used to determine 'factor X' have twofold intentions; to increase democratic involvement thus increasing satisfaction in decisions surrounding taxation, whilst as an extension, ensuring human-focused and regionally focused policies are pursued. This is, again, stemming from the perception that taxation is a form of theft. Fundamentally, this derives from a disconnection between policy and people. That which is pursued by traditional production centric administrations fails to prioritise the cause-and-effect basis of taxation; namely that that which we put in is returned to us through services. When the goal of fiscal policy is production, these services get side-lined and organised in the most economically spendthrift way possible, as opposed to the most socially beneficial way possible, in order to minimise spending and maximise growth. By adopting a human-centred, degrowth, common-good approach, the contributory effect of taxation is re-emphasised and the benefits that derive from these contributions are returned to the people. This is enforced by the survey system which ensures that the priorities of the population are subsequently prioritised by governors, thus closing the unnecessary chasm between the governed and the governors through a feedback loop. Ultimately this would serve to strengthen procedural fairness, the principle by which, even if there is not universal agreement on decisions, the fact that there has been a tangible input process ensures greater satisfaction and acceptance of policy, even amongst those who disagree thereby increasing satisfaction, tackling disaffection, and creating a perceptible link between contribution and welfare.

Of course, to talk of contribution and welfare necessitates a consideration of the practicalities of how such welfare proposals should be financed. This is neither a new consideration, and more importantly, or a radical one. Widespread, new welfare policies have been rapidly implemented before, this in reference to the post-war

period and the heavy implementation of Keynesian economics to address a welfare crisis. Ultimately, this proposal is founded on the need to tackle a welfare crisis of our own. As such, a variety of radical contribution measures are necessary to fund both a Universal Basic Income and feedback-based spending measures. This would be necessarily multifaceted, requiring an overhaul of conventional contemporary taxation systems, no single tax measure sufficing to properly fund these proposals.

In this regard, it would include a radical progressive taxation, beginning at the point beyond Universal Basic Income as this would negate the need for tax-free income on the first portion of wages. This would seek to tax high wages at a high rate in order to ensure that each individual has the opportunity to contribute as much as possible to society with ease. Alongside this, a sizable wealth tax, ensuring that inherited wealth cannot lead to societal inequality and marginalisation. Furthermore, there would need to be a resolution to both capital gains and tax havens to ensure that contributions would be equitable and enforceable across all sectors of society and income streams as well as unavoidable. Furthermore, by taxing capital gains effectively, tax havens would be directly combatted, something that could be further regulated by improving transparency on international financial transactions. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list of potential measures, the general concept of radical taxation is essential to follow this proposal.