



# The role of participatory transition design in mitigating erosion of participatory democracy

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With help from my co-instructors: Stevens, Gaver and Karahasanovic

# Agenda

- *Motivation*
- *Background and the intent with this work*
- *Methodology and methods*
- *Examples - Designing for democratic values and decisions – grassroots*
- *Discussion and conclusion*



# 1. Motivation

# Democracy in peril?

Finding good socio-cultural-political systems is a wicked problem. Democracy is not doing well. A fair question: should democracy be saved?

**Participatory Democracy** – broad participation of constituents in decision-making – these days also based on the use of digital technologies (Digital democracy)

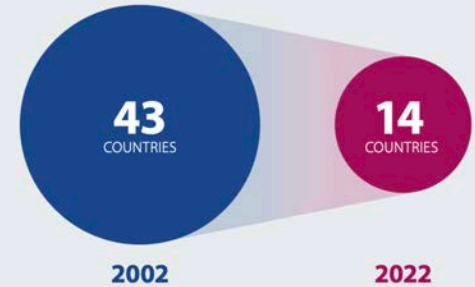
**Representative Democracy** – indirect one, where citizens choose others to represent them

**Direct Democracy** – so called pure democracy like in ancient Athens (no longer practiced) where all citizens are invited to participate in all decisions

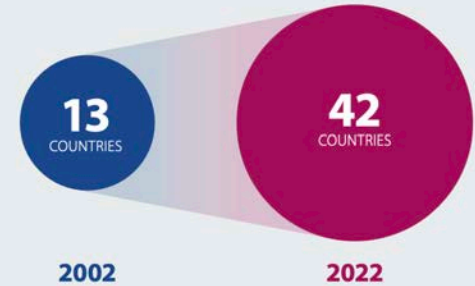
**Parliamentary Democracy** – citizens elect representatives to a legislative parliament to make laws for the country.

*Democracy is a system of government in which laws, policies, leadership, and major undertakings of a state are directly or indirectly decided by the people (A. Lincoln)*

## NUMBER OF COUNTRIES DEMOCRATIZING



## NUMBER OF COUNTRIES AUTOCRATIZING



## SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION LIVING IN AUTOCRACIES



# The core values

While the answer is not obvious, cultivating values associated with democratic decision-making is relevant. Those include:

- Individual freedoms (including not to participate, e.g., voting)
- Participation
- Importance of collective decision-making
- Human rights
- Equality
- Tolerance
- Pluralism
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Trust
- Peaceful conflict resolution...

“

*Among the panoply of questions concerning technology that escape attention, perhaps the most important one involves how technology bears on democracy*

*(Sclove, 1995, p. 8)*

DEMOCRACY  
AND  
TECHNOLOGY



RICHARD E. SCLOVE



# Resolve

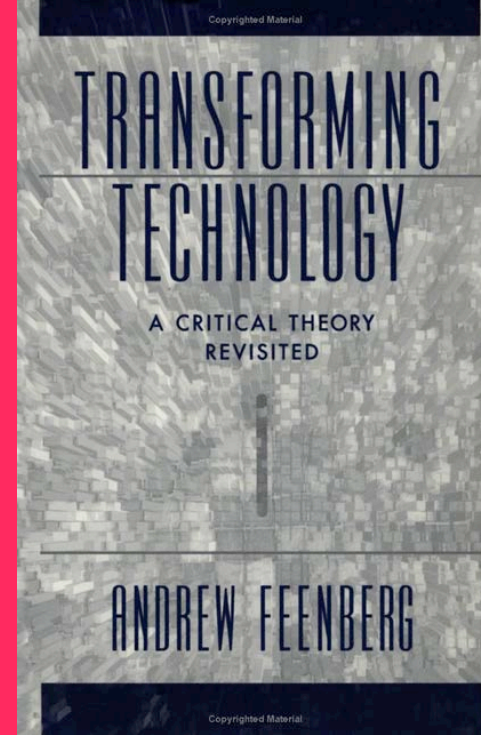
## Can tech help?

This is an interesting subject at the intersection of Technology, Participatory (Digital) Democracy and Participatory Design

“

*The degradation of labor, education, and environment is rooted not in technology per se but in antidemocratic values that govern technological development*

*(Feenberg, 2002, p. 3)*





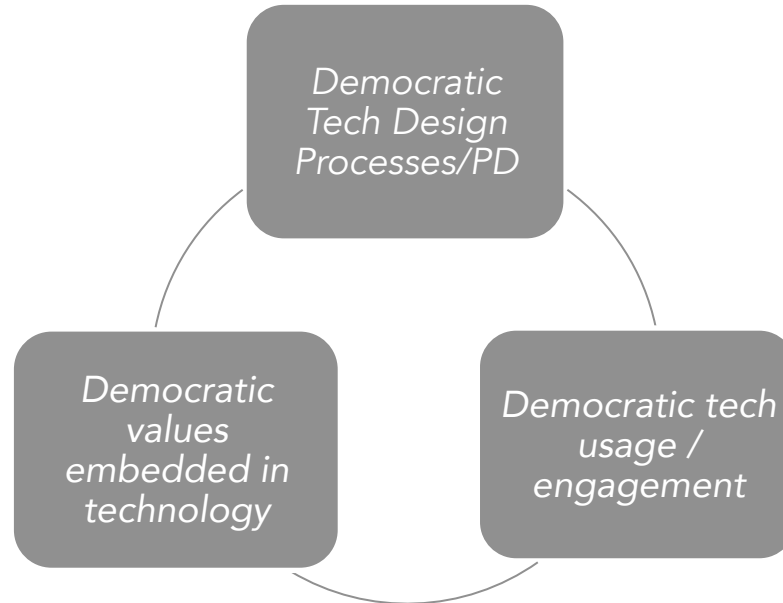
2.

Background (previous research)

Technology, design, and democracy intersections

# Participatory Democracy and Participatory Technology Design

Good or bad?  
It can be both!

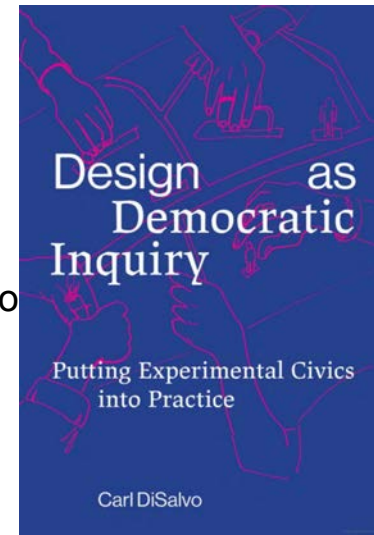
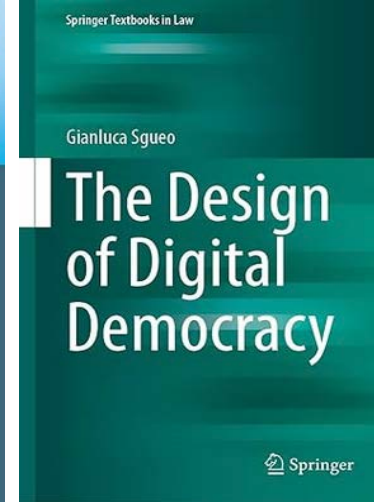
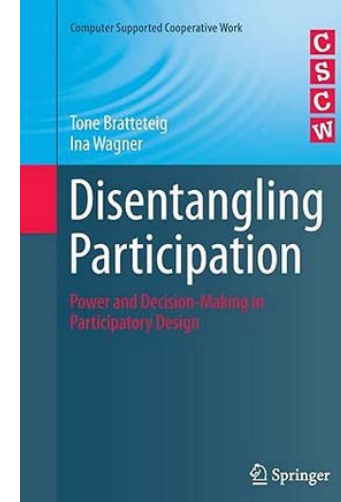


# Previous work

Richly covers research on **relationship** between Democracy and Technology (e.g., Micheals, Sclove, Feenberg)

Participatory (technology) Design (PD) outlines a relationship between technology design – in the beginning, rooted in politics and a part of the Nordic model, multi-party parliamentary democracy – and democracy.

Some of the significant contributors: Ehn, Bødker, Kyng, DiSalvo, Bratteteig, Sgueo and many others ...



# Inspirational existing (platform) designs:

## vTaiwan and Decide Madrid

vTaiwan supports participatory democracy by:

- transparency and accountability (open discussions and decisions)
- crowd-sourcing (citizens contribute ideas and give feedback on specific policy issues –these are used to inform government’s decision-making)
- moderating (ensuring that discussions on the platform are respectful and constructive)
- decision-making by consensus (aiming to find common ground among stakeholders)
- implementation (commitment to implement decisions made).

Decide Madrid supports transparency, accountability, and collective decision-making by:

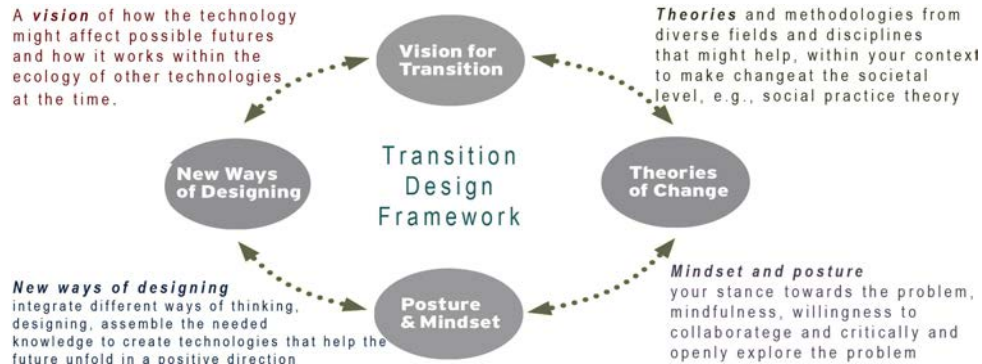
- debating (discussing concerns, views, and ideas)
- proposing (citizens can make various proposals of relevance to Madrid)
- polling (carried out when a proposal receives support from 1 per cent of residents, or when council wants citizens to decide on an issue)
- engaging citizens in processes
- engaging citizens in participatory budgeting.

# The intent:

TO EXPLORE **THE DESIGN FOR DEMOCRACY**

from the grassroots level, focusing on supporting democratic values, engagement, and participation in the design of technology for democracy – with larger issues and longer time perspectives in mind.

The latter – inspiration from transition design and the framework suggested by Irwin, Tonkinwise, Kossoff, Scupelli (2015)



# 3. Methodology and Methods

# Methodology

Teaching-based research, two different project-based courses – RtD and TD

Course/topic	RtD	TD
2021	identify and amplify local sustainability (including social) initiatives and innovations through design	opportunities that grassroots design could offer in facilitating transitions toward a more sustainable society
2022	if and how the DIY paradigm offers opportunities to enhance the modifiability of technology, ultimately contributing to a more democratic and participatory approach to technology development	understanding how culture and cultural institutions could support sustainability transitions (environmental and social)
2023		the design for social innovation related to the democratisation of manufacturing, finances, or older adult care was considered. The main objectives were to encourage more democratic participation and foster inclusion

# Methods

1) The method toolbox encompassed, among others:

- **Diverse mapping techniques** (e.g., Giga mapping (Sevaldson, 2011), Winterhouse Institute's Social Pathways, stakeholder relations mapping).
- **Visioning and futuring methods** (e.g., speculative scenarios, prototypes, The Thing from the Future, Cover Story, experiential futures, forecasting, foresight (The future is Ours), The Futures Wheel, imaginaries, backcasting, dark matter (Lockton & Candy, 2018)).
- **Theatre and movement-based methods** (e.g., bodystorming, roleplaying, stage-setting).
- **Methods to support participatory decision-making** (dialogue, debate, consensus, voting).
- **Methods to support understanding and creating theories of change** (e.g., Nesta – create a theory of change, Max Neef theory of needs visual tools, social practice theory toolkit).
- **Diverse card sets** for ideation and inspiration (e.g., The Beautiful Trouble, New Metaphors), self-reflection, mindset (e.g., With/Out modernity), impact assessment (e.g., Tarot Cards of Tech), methods to work with theories of change (e.g., behavioural economics cards), articulating visions (Narata storytelling cards), ethics (Maslow Mirrored).



# Methods

2) The plurishop workshop method (RSD 23 paper with Junge, Stevens, and Gaver) featuring **multiple teams** working on **multiple inquiries**

**Pre-plurishop** (characteristic for this workshop format) is used toward:

*Gaining Familiarity with the design domain and the methodological approach.*

*Finding Provisional Entry Points* through participatory visioning and systemic design methods

*Learning and Adopting a Method*

**Plurishop** (integration and synthesis)

Integrates different perspectives gained through multiple inquiries and entry points

Synthesizes the prototypes and ideas discussed for each direction

The list of methods and teams for the plurishop

- Thing from the future - Team 1 - Inquiry for CM
- Cover Story - Team 5 - Inquiry for AT
- Futures Wheel - Team 6 - NIS
- Tarot Cards for Tech - Team 4 - RL
- Backcasting - Team 3 - CM
- Three Horizons - Team 2 - NIS

### The Plurishop schedule and instructions

There will be six rounds, see how it works!  
Each team takes 30 min to present and have other teams apply the method on thier own inquiry

round 1 (10:15 - 10:45)

This is how you Backcast!



Team 3



Team 1  
backcasting on CM  
inquiry



Team 2  
backcasting on  
NIS inquiry

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Team 4  
backcasting on  
RL



Team 5  
backcasting on  
AT



Team 6  
backcasting on  
NIS

round 2 (10:45 - 11:15)

This is how you use the futures wheel!



Team 6



Team 1  
using future wheel on  
CM



Team 2  
using future wheel on  
NIS



Team 3  
using future wheel on  
CM

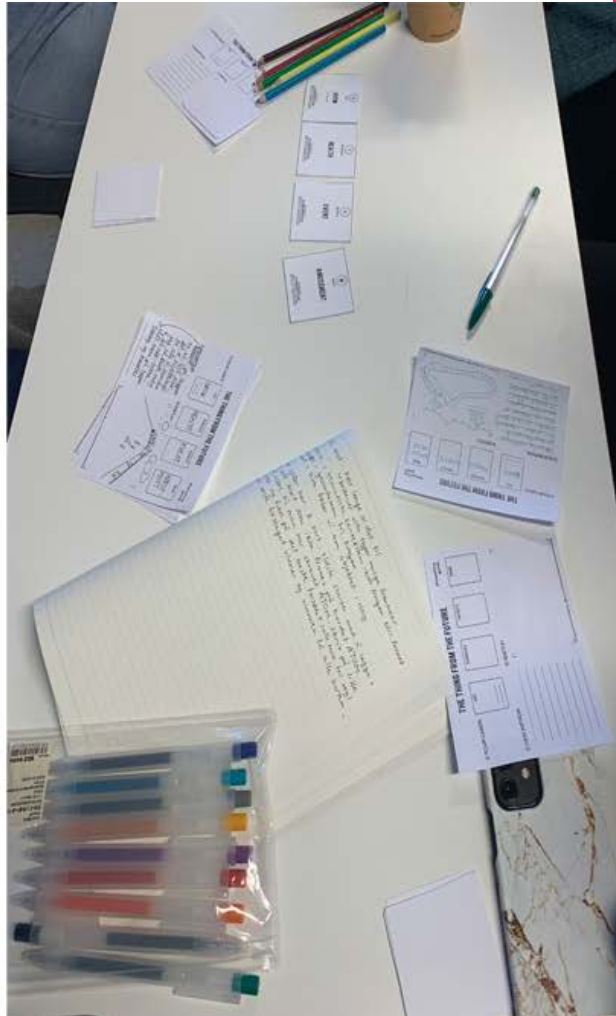


Team 4  
using future wheel on  
RL



Team 5  
using future wheel on  
AT

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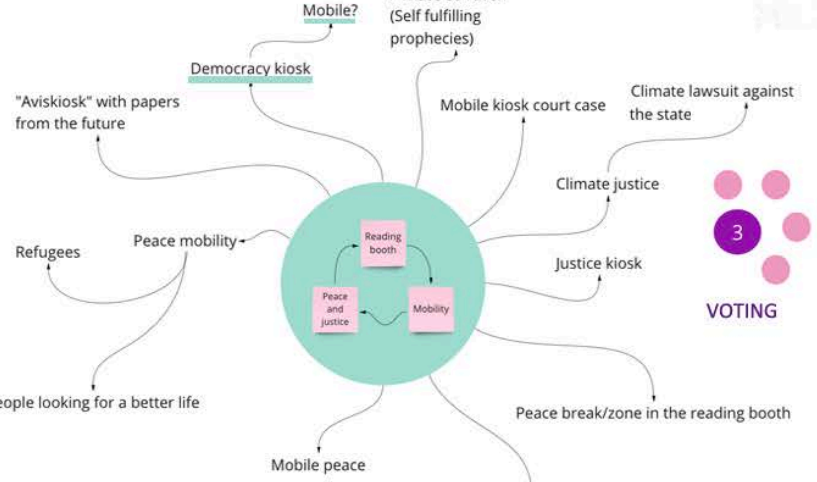
# Examples from the courses

Example of people making places	What makes this interesting?	Social dimension(s) 	Up-/down scale	<p><b>THE VISION</b> What will this future look like?</p> <p>Create a speculative visualisation-scenario of a Community (smart neighborhood) with their own power grid, fueled by solar panels and windmills. Power is stored in a large battery and shared between all residents. The leftover power can be sold back to the state. The money earned can cover the common expenses and make it cheaper to live there.</p> <p>How would this look like? Ultimate goal: sustainability.</p> <p>balanse mellom strøm som strøm som går inn og strøm som går ut.</p> <p>how can user participate in the back casting process?</p>  	<p><b>THEORY OF CHANGE</b></p> <p>Use it to approach questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better for who?</li> <li>- Datas sharing for motivation</li> <li>- Transparent display of poweruse.</li> </ul> <p>Speculative design. Scenario for sustainable future</p> <p>BC: The imagined successful outcome of the future. Visioning: participatory, with users</p> <p><b>DYSTOPIA OR UTOPIA?</b></p> <p>Utopian: benefit for the community, savings Dystopian: data sharing, privacy violations, group press.</p> <p>Vision: opens for reflection with users on alternative future. Residents learn a future-oriented perspective.</p> 
 <p>Urban gardens in own apartment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mat</li> <li>- Aktiviteter</li> <li>- Skaper en relasjon til naturen</li> <li>- Tilknyttet prosessen tok medprodusjon (tid, energi, smag)</li> <li>- Helt til matvare</li> </ul>	<p>Local food</p>	<p>REKO ring</p> <p>Bytte</p>	<p><b>THE VISION</b> What will this future look like?</p> <p>Create a speculative visualisation-scenario of a Community (smart neighborhood) with their own power grid, fueled by solar panels and windmills. Power is stored in a large battery and shared between all residents. The leftover power can be sold back to the state. The money earned can cover the common expenses and make it cheaper to live there.</p> <p>How would this look like? Ultimate goal: sustainability.</p> <p>balanse mellom strøm som strøm som går inn og strøm som går ut.</p> <p>how can user participate in the back casting process?</p>  	<p><b>THEORY OF CHANGE</b></p> <p>Use it to approach questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better for who?</li> <li>- Datas sharing for motivation</li> <li>- Transparent display of poweruse.</li> </ul> <p>Speculative design. Scenario for sustainable future</p> <p>BC: The imagined successful outcome of the future. Visioning: participatory, with users</p> <p><b>DYSTOPIA OR UTOPIA?</b></p> <p>Utopian: benefit for the community, savings Dystopian: data sharing, privacy violations, group press.</p> <p>Vision: opens for reflection with users on alternative future. Residents learn a future-oriented perspective.</p> 
 <p>Haralds Vaffel</p> <p>Apartment transformed to a take-away "restaurant" – shut down by Mattilsynet</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hjemmelaget</li> <li>- Går ut sted som til noe annet</li> <li>- Klart det det lokale. Men vil dra til nærbutikk, ikke til Torv</li> </ul>	<p>Local food</p> <p>Local-Social: Connected – community</p>	<p>Oslo Restaurant day?</p>		
 <p>Vestkant torget</p> <p>Space for local flea market every saturday</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Høyt kommunalt salg av ting</li> <li>- Gleder ting får rykte for i verden får vent på noe som andre ikke klarer å gjøre</li> <li>- Møteplass</li> </ul>	<p>Local-Social: Connected – community</p> <p>Local-Social: Enabled - jobs</p> <p>Sustainability</p>			
 <p>Party raft</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ungdommens kreativitet</li> <li>- Utvidet sosialt nett</li> <li>- Bygger på drap og lokale materialer</li> </ul>	<p>Local-Social: Connected – community</p>	<p>"Drivhus" på ffr-dammen - plants &amp; chill</p>		
 <p>Russebuss</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Samarbeid mellom unge</li> <li>- Organiserer</li> <li>- Gjør det</li> </ul>	<p>Local-Social: Connected – community</p> <p>Local-Social: Enabled - jobs</p>			

## METHODS & ACTIVITIES

- Future-oriented roleplay activity**
- Future-oriented discussion**
- Workshop:**
- Inspiration: FN roleplay for climate
  - Use for negotiating energy
- cardboard presentation

# THINKING



# PROTOTYPING



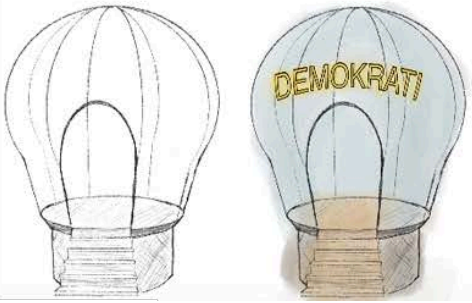
- information on both the inside and outside?
- catching attention?
- Waking curiosity and participation
- Small and mobile - how?

Transpa-  
rency

Mobile

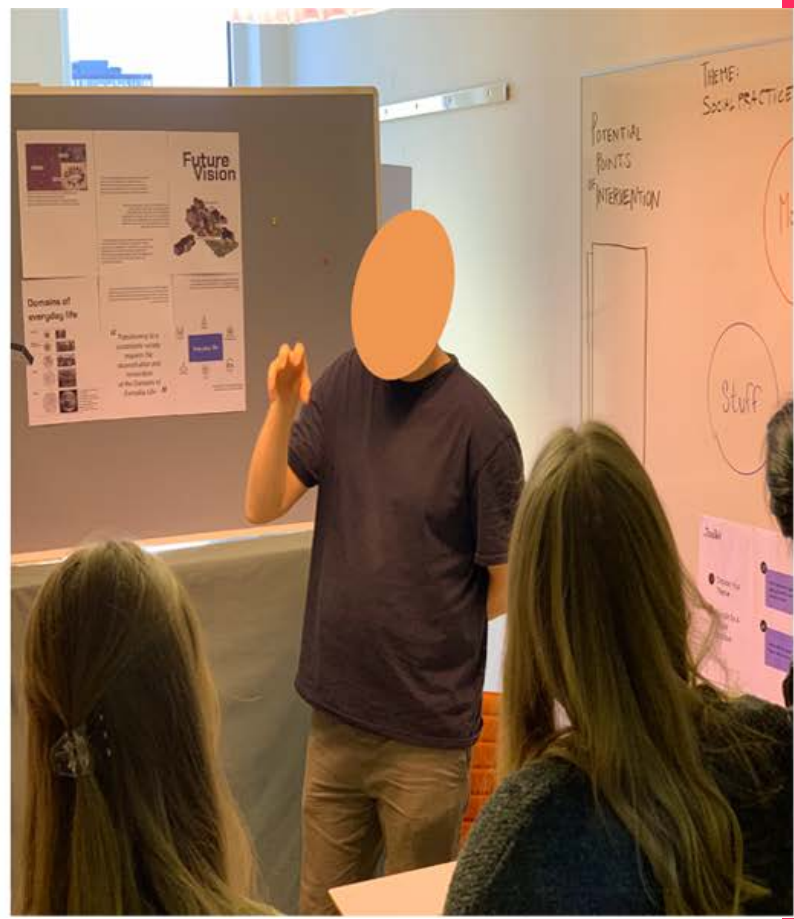
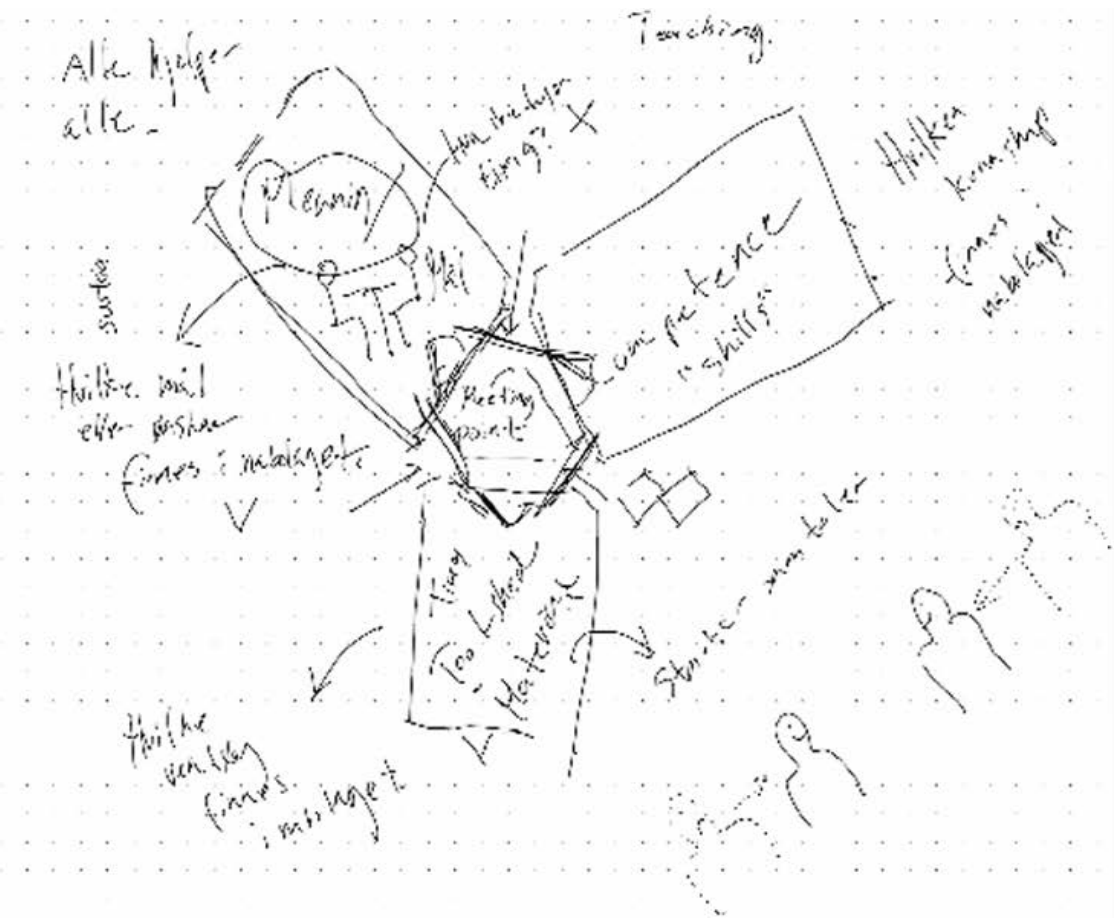


Transparency in democratic processes





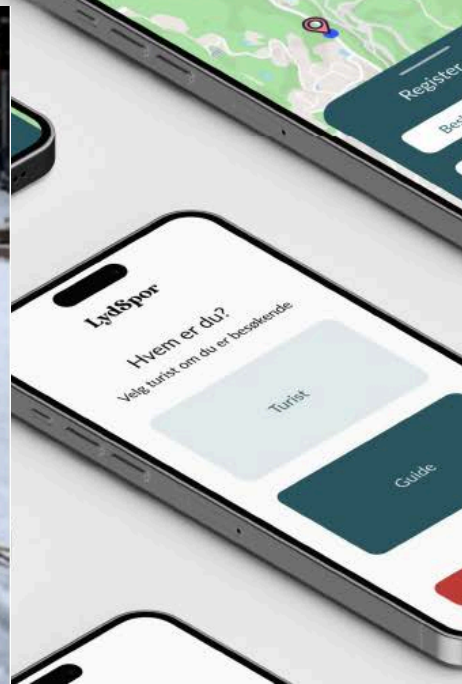




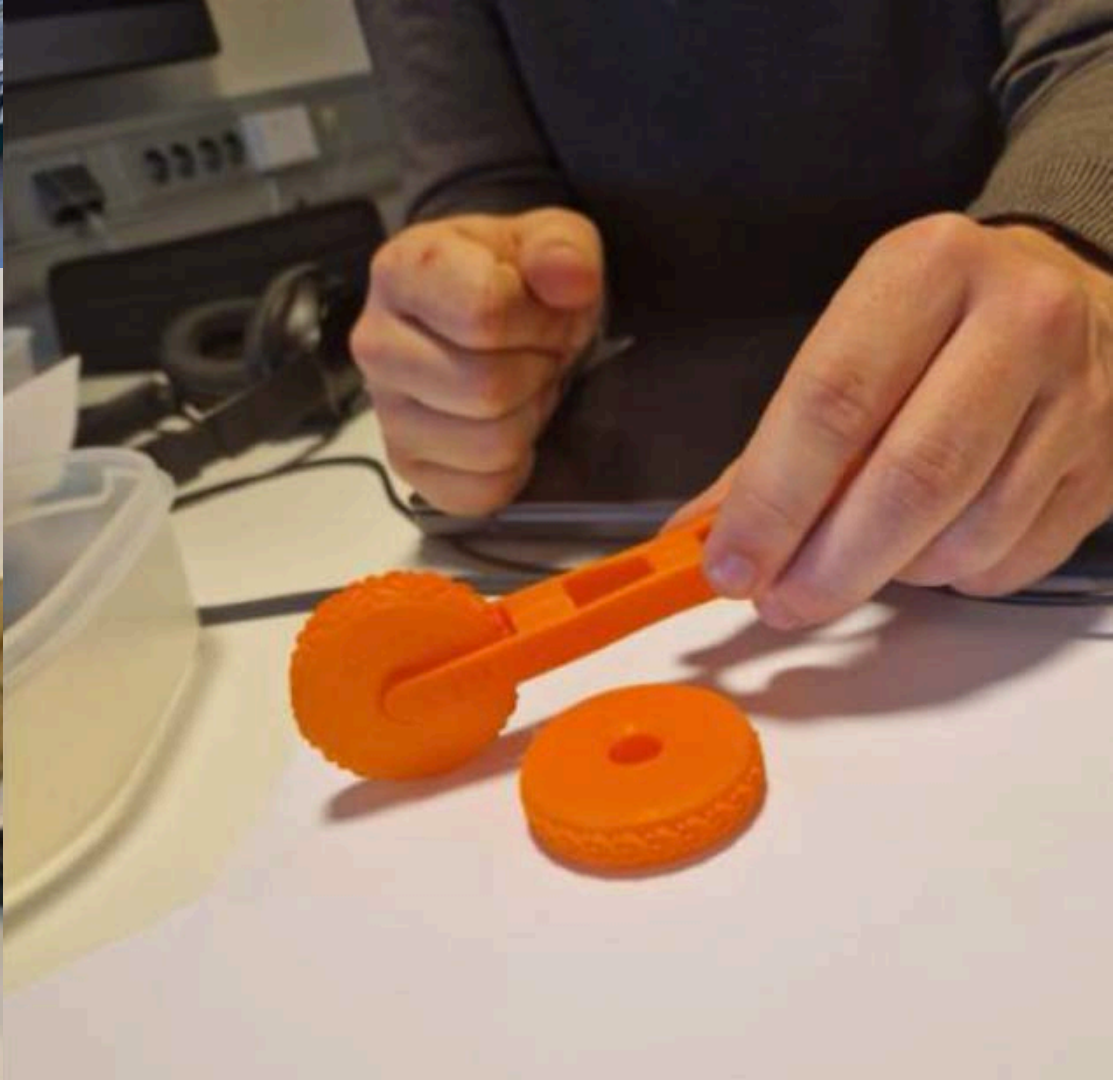




# Inclusion







# What did we learn about technology for democracy, from grassroots?

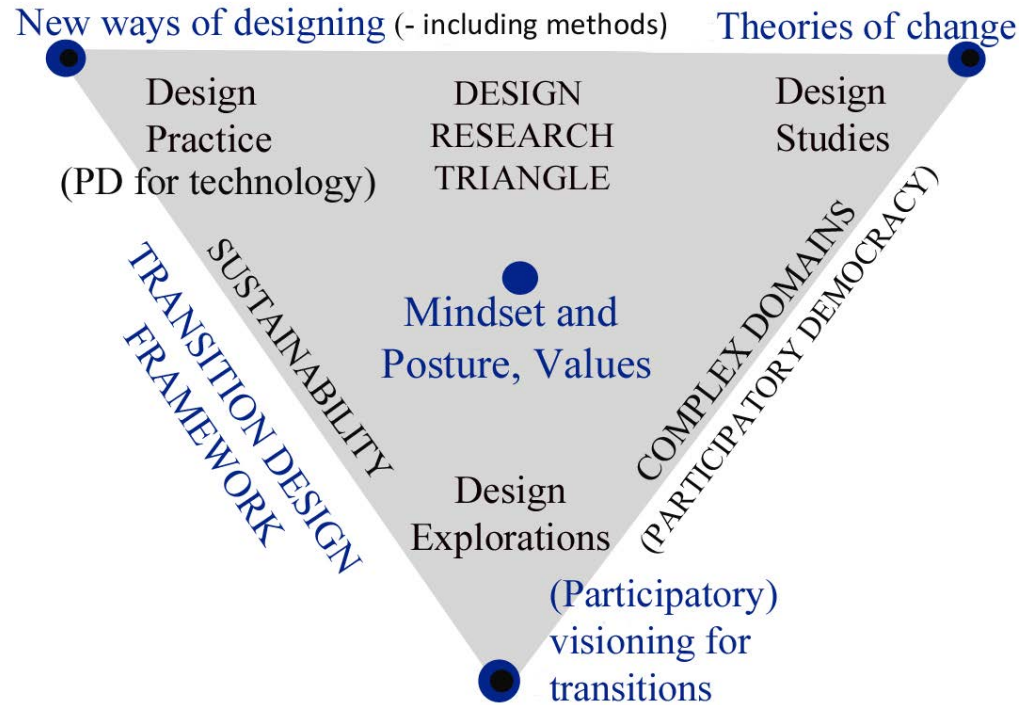
- The insights gained from plurishops were instrumental in shaping qualitatively different designs.
  - Conflicts or frictions can be used to address the problem successfully
  - Creating proto-practices supporting more democratic decision-making is important – it also includes educating the participants or providing the right tools for the work
  - A gap in participatory technology representation was identified and the subsequent focus on democratic technology development demonstrated that access to co-developing technology is still a barrier (even for our students) – pointing to the importance of the concept of technological imagination and competence.
  - Cultural institutions can have a significant role in supporting participatory democracy and its values
- This finding is the result of 4 projects whose outcome were public space installations fostering dialogue
- Finally, the inclusion of ChatGPT in the spring( in TD 2023 course) has really boosted the outcomes of the projects, as students expanded their domain knowledge significantly (forthcomming)



# Discussion

The explorations presented in this paper aimed to develop a better understanding of how participatory (often within social sustainability) visions and initiatives are shaped to empower and move local communities toward a more desirable, democratic, and inclusive society.

# The main result – a method: Participatory Transition Design





# Conclusion

Participatory transition design seems to be well supported by systemic design methods and plurishops in particular.

The lessons learned from this work point to the importance of participatory transition design to adopt some of the characteristics discussed concerning digital democracies – transparency, accountability, prevention of negative consequences for citizens, and decision-making by consensus through, for example, polling, voting, or debate – they might support responsible design for rebuilding trust in participatory democracy.



# Thanks!!

## Any questions?

You can also find me at [almira@uio.no](mailto:almira@uio.no)