

**EVENT SUMMARY**

# **MAINSTREAMING DEMOCRACY**

**17th JULY 2025**



**POLITICAL  
WATCH**

## About Political Watch

Political Watch is an independent organisation based in Spain that specialises in research for social change, political advocacy and the development of technologies to achieve more transparent, inclusive and participatory public policies. We work on the democracy of the future, activating alliances to reform the institutions of the present.



# INTRODUCTION

## Context

In a global context of regression in civil liberties and rights, the weakening of democratic principles affects multiple areas of public life, from climate action to social and economic policies. The erosion of trust in institutions, together with growing inequality and the rise of authoritarianism, is putting the foundations of democracy at risk.

Consequently, the progressive disarticulation of civil society and social movements has a direct impact on the capacity to make decisions for a sustainable and desirable future in all areas. Hence the need to address the democratic agenda from an intersectoral perspective that allows different causes to converge.

For all these reasons, on 17 July 2025, we organised an event in Madrid in collaboration with the [European Climate Foundation](#), which gathered 45 representatives from 34 civil society organisations.

## Objectives of the event

- 1** Explore how the democratic agenda can be mainstreamed into other sectors, with special emphasis on climate and the environment.
- 2** Connect and exchange experiences, challenges and concerns about citizen participation within and outside institutions.
- 3** Map out windows of opportunity and shared themes to consider joint action or working groups.
- 4** Enhance the impact of an action making use of collective intelligence.

## Ideas and expectations

Before the meeting, we asked participants to share their interests and expectations, with the aim of mapping needs and concerns around mainstreaming democracy. The responses were very useful for putting together the agenda, and we believe they also offer an overview that may be of interest to other organisations that believe in democratic enhancement as a common agenda.

As a result, we are sharing a summary of those ideas, which responded to the question '**Why would you be interested in participating in this meeting?**':

*Identifying stakeholders working on the democratic and climate agenda*

*Learning about innovative methodologies and formulas for participation*

*Imagining new political forms and building alliances*

*Extending the democratic agenda beyond 'niche' organisations*

*Strengthening knowledge about the intersection between climate and democracy*

*Incorporating the democratic agenda into my organisation's work*

*Bringing an anti-racist perspective to the debate on democracy and climate change*

*Co-creating responses to the attack on democratic values*



Additionally, we wanted to find out **which issues resonate when talking about mainstreaming democracy**, especially in the context of climate change. The responses help us map the interests of the different participating organisations which, thanks to their diversity, reflect a wide range of causes and sensibilities.

The ideas that informed the day's debate were as follows:

*Processes for co-creating new forms of citizen participation and democracy*

*'Traditional' NGOs and their role in a new model of democracy*

*Understanding the link between democracy and why democratic regimes are important and urgent for the climate crisis*

*How to incorporate effective participation processes and compliance verification mechanisms into laws and regulations*

*How to build political pressure to tackle the climate emergency*

*Preventing the wave of deregulation from slowing down decarbonisation*

*How to advance political spaces and a climate agenda with racial justice*

*The relationship between the EU's ecological and energy transitions and energy colonialism*

*Environmental activism and global democratic setbacks*

*The unrest caused by the housing affordability crisis*

*How to ensure that enthusiasm and motivation do not wane in local action groups*

# INSPIRING EXPERIENCES

In order to think collectively, we first need **to be inspired, to discover, to feel curious.**

That is why we asked several people, representing their work in different organisations, to bring their experiences of mainstreaming democracy to the conference. These presentations, as diverse as the projects they described, helped to initiate dialogue, sometimes questioning how we talk about democracy or exploring issues that normally go unnoticed in this type of space.

## **"CLIMATE ORGANISATIONS AND OPEN GOVERNMENT PROCESSES: PARALLEL LIVES THAT NEVER CROSS"**

***Political Watch (presented by Paula Llera)***

Political Watch, based on its experience working in institutional processes of government and open government, has detected that Spain is at a critical juncture in promoting this agenda. At the same time, the 5th Open Government Plan, the Open Parliament Plan and the Consensus for Open Administration are being drawn up. This also coincides with Spain's presidency of the steering committee of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), the most important international body in this field.

These processes propose reforms in areas such as transparency, citizen participation, integrity, and accountability. Not all measures are equally ambitious, but they do have potential if sufficient pressure is exerted by civil society.

The aforementioned plans incorporate measures such as the Lobbying Act, the Open Administration Act and comprehensive reform of public consultations, issues that affect the work of climate organisations. Access to environmental information, preventing it from being blocked by commercial interests; monitoring lobbying by groups opposed to the just transition; and modernising public consultations, in which we all participate, are just a few examples.

Furthermore, the OGP, which leads internationally on the principles of Open Government and Open State, has decided to decisively promote the intersection between these principles and the fight against climate change in an inclusive and cross-cutting manner. So much so that it forms part of this international organisation's strategic lines for the coming years.

In short, there is a 'hot moment' and a call for climate organisations to get involved. But these worlds have not quite come together, and Political Watch wonders why. Some insights into possible answers include excessive institutionalisation, but also the use of different languages.

## **"COMMUNITY TIES TO REBUILD EVERYTHING"**

**Desbordando Democracia (presented by Adriana Zumarán)**

The aim of Desbordando Democracia, the result of a partnership between SOS Racismo and Conciencia Afro, is not only to challenge, but also to imagine ways of raising awareness and strengthening existing political processes within the anti-racist movement. It identifies a series of elements in the current conceptualisation of democracy that are incompatible with an anti-racist narrative.

Agendas focusing on issues such as participation do not include the perspectives, ways of thinking, or political demands of racialised people within this territory.

It used to be said that Spain was a racist country, and people denied it, whereas now everyone claims to be anti-racist. However, this is not real and true anti-racism. It has not necessarily undergone a process of reflection and profound change, not only in discourse, but also in practice.

With all this in mind, Desbordando Democracia works in different areas:

1. Sharing knowledge based on recognition of the political epistemology of the anti-racist movement.
2. Participatory support for the anti-racist movement.
3. Communication and political advocacy, building organically with colleagues in the movement.

Finally, it is essential to emphasise that we are in a state of emergency, and that action requires us to rethink our power relations.

## **"CONSIDERATIONS ON PARTICIPATION"**

**Alianza por el Clima (presented by Carlos Martínez)**

Alianza por el Clima is a platform whose objective is to mobilise Spanish society in the fight against climate change. It is made up of a diverse group of social and climate organisations, as well as trade unions and agricultural organisations.

In this platform, work on the democratic and participatory agenda focuses not only on institutions, but also on the configuration of the organisations themselves.

At the institutional level, they are part of the National Climate Council, as well as participating in public consultations by submitting allegations and contributions and in various expert committees.

One of the proposals they are promoting is the creation of new Climate Assemblies in Spain, as well as improving the participation of the Spanish Office for Climate Change, especially in relation to the COPs.

## **"HOW CAN WE PROGRESS TOWARDS TRULY DIVERSE SPACES FOR POLITICAL DISCUSSION?"**

**SOS Racismo (presented by Maria Bennouna)**

Truly diverse spaces must be safe for anti-racist groups not only to speak, but also for their voices to set the agenda and have the potential to guide actions and transform the debate.

To achieve this, there must be an effective redistribution of power and, consciously, of resources. Thus, it is not a question of being invited to give an opinion, but of having a real presence, spaces of prominence. This involves, for example, reviewing who moderates, who gets paid, who has the final say.

Finally, it must be borne in mind that hegemonic forms of politics are not the only ones. A diverse space for discussion validates and understands that the methodologies used by movements in the global South are useful. The ways in which space is occupied may differ, but this does not diminish its power.

Finally, it must be understood that the neutrality sometimes demanded of anti-racist movements reinforces the status quo. In short, discourse must be transformed through mutual recognition.

## **"NARRATIVES FOR DESIRABLE FUTURES"**

**Futuro en Común (presented by María González)**

Futuro en Común is an alliance of civil society organisations from a wide range of sectors, from development cooperation to climate action. These organisations define a joint agenda to promote and focus on citizens' rights.

For some time now, Futuro en Común has been working with Komons to generate context analysis and discourse that facilitates the articulation of narrative proposals. This is not a reactive strategy to combat misinformation, but rather a proactive framework.

The aim is to generate a political vision of a desirable future, reaching ambivalent audiences who can be convinced. This is, of course, very complex and requires considerable resources.

The strategy is based on the following pillars, inspired by Brazil's experience in recent years:

- A segmentation structure supported by broad alliances (content creators, artists, etc.).
- A digital monitoring system for narratives and the impact they are having on each audience.

Currently, part of the effort is focused on securing resources, because it is difficult to tackle the situation separately, but together it is possible.

## "DEMOCRATISING DATA GOVERNANCE IN THE ENERGY SECTOR"

*Col·legi de Professionals de la Ciència Política i de la Sociologia de Catalunya (presented by Josep Vives)*

We live in a time when disinformation and influence processes are becoming increasingly effective. Therefore, in order to democratise, we must work on access to data, bringing data to individuals and communities. Digitalisation also facilitates this task.

Currently, access to, control and management of data represent a form of structural power that is often not yet incorporated into our theoretical frameworks, either by public administrations or civil society.

Some examples of data access in the energy sector include:

- [Datadis](#): allows users to view details of their different energy consumption patterns. Potential to reduce costs, understand consumption habits and make informed decisions.
- [Portal de datos de Rubí](#): energy consumption data available to neighbourhood communities.
- [Portal Comunitat Energètica](#): publicly funded portal for energy communities of any territorial scope. The idea is that the portal serves to 'weave' communities and relationships between communities.

Data is power, and if it is not democratised, that power becomes concentrated. It is not enough to generate data: it must be made accessible, readable and actionable for communities. Organising today means organising access to, understanding and use of data. In conclusion, the issue of data must be incorporated into the organisational and theoretical framework of administrations and civil society.

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## **"WHO DECIDES WHAT? BUILDING DEMOCRATIC INFRASTRUCTURES SO DATA AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SERVE PEOPLE AND THE PLANET"**

**The Data Tank (presented by Anna Colom)**

First, we must make sense of a complicated present, marked by several problems:

1. Power imbalance. In the case of data, this stems from large-scale concentration in big tech.
2. The problem of narratives. Who tells us what? Techno-solutionism reigns supreme.
3. Risks to democracy and human rights.
4. Threat to planetary resilience. Planetary boundaries are gradually being exceeded.

Given all of the above, what can we do?:

- Reclaim our agency in building the societies and futures we want to live in.
- Protect and design resilient democracies, where power is shared and decisions are made in an inclusive and collaborative manner.
- Create collaborative ecosystems for climate justice and governance.

## **"DEMOCRACY AND COUNTERPOWER"**

**Greenpeace España y Portugal (presented by Eva Saldaña)**

Greenpeace works to promote democracy through alliances. In Spain and Portugal, it is clear that space must be given to the democratic agenda. At the European level, on the other hand, anti-SLAPP work is being strengthened.

Greenpeace has always worked to defend democratic and civic space. In addition, in recent years the following lines of work have been promoted:

1. Reform of the accountability regime for large companies, especially through corporate responsibility measures.
2. Transformation of the current model for negotiating international trade agreements.
3. Promotion of democratic space, with guarantees.
4. Legislative reforms that guarantee the right to protest and freedom of expression.
5. The Spanish Youth and Intergenerational Justice Act, establishing criteria and principles that the Act should comply with regarding democratic space for young people.
6. The defence of those who defend, protecting the work of activists.
7. The transposition of the anti-SLAPP directive.
8. Access to information and transparency, in partnership with the Pro-Access Coalition.
9. Citizen empowerment, through support for initiatives such as the Permanent Citizens' Parliament.

## "HOW CAN SOCIAL INCLUSION BE INCORPORATED INTO THE ENERGY TRANSITION IN MADRID?"

**EAPN Madrid (presented by Katia Chávez)**

The TEMIS Project aims to bring the voices of vulnerable people to issues related to just transition and the fight against climate change. It stems from the need to democratise and make these issues accessible to the people who suffer most from the lack of effective climate policies. Furthermore, these people are the ones with the least access to information and resources on this topic.

Thus, TEMIS has carried out five participatory processes to learn about the feelings and proposals of people in vulnerable situations with regard to climate change and just transition. As part of these processes, workshops were held on specific topics (transport, housing, energy poverty, waste, etc.) that were chosen by people living in poverty based on their concerns and interests. Beyond being a question of democracy and justice, it is necessary to include these people in policy debates and design because their life experience of resilience and survival is extremely valuable.

With everything they have learned, they have created a participation guide, providing different key points, such as the need to adapt language, build people's trust, and, the greatest challenge, the importance of conveying proposals so that they reach decision-makers.





# CHALLENGES

After learning about different inspiring experiences, we proposed working on challenges and supporting each other to promote the exchange of ideas. Some of these challenges had been collected before the event, but others were contributed by the participants during the day. We highlight the two that arose organically during the meeting: how to talk about citizen participation and be understood when we talk about participation, and how to operationalise anti-racism in discussions about democracy.

All the challenges were articulated through two questions: **what ideas come to mind, and how can these ideas be articulated?**

The aim of working on challenges was not to reach consensus or find definitive answers, but rather to start a conversation that could help organisations seeking to resolve difficulties in their projects or internal reflections. The collective intelligence generated was the starting point for connecting common ideas, asking other questions and presenting new approaches to work.

The challenges to be addressed were as follows:

- 1** How can we activate people who have been part of participatory experiences? How can we generate democratic activism?
- 2** What does society think about democracy? What would we like to know? Who has that information?
- 3** How can we engage all those who want to take action against climate change in collective action?
- 4** How can anti-racism be put into practice?
- 5** How can we generate a broad movement for democratic renewal?
- 6** What are we talking about when we talk about participation?

## CHALLENGE

HOW CAN WE ACTIVATE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN PART OF PARTICIPATORY EXPERIENCES, SUCH AS CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES? HOW CAN WE GENERATE DEMOCRATIC ACTIVISM?

## CHALLENGE PROPOSED BY

Marea Deliberativa and Demos Lab

## IDEAS

1. **Encourage participants to form part of a collective project**, setting up an association, network or alliance. Working together increases the capacity to fulfil agreements and compensate for different levels of involvement and motivation among activists. It should be borne in mind that the most motivated people are not always those with the most time, and that resources are essential for this activism to continue functioning and have a future.
2. **Draw on other international experiences**. Work with former participants in assemblies in other countries, who can facilitate the sharing of knowledge.
3. **Manage expectations**. Bear in mind that participatory processes do not end with the approval of a document of recommendations and, therefore, the capacities needed to implement these measures must be developed afterwards.
4. **Develop sectoral strategies**. Given the complexity of the climate challenge, people will feel challenged by different circumstances. It is therefore proposed to take action on specific issues: biodiversity, mobility, food, etc.
5. **Prioritising means giving something up**. Working on what to give up is important in order to achieve a minimum common ground for mobilisation.

## HOW CAN THESE IDEAS BE ARTICULATED?

- Work in partnership, joining forces between the actors who organise the participatory process and the groups that emerge from the process.
- If an association is formed, deepen its governance by actively involving participants in its design.
- Encourage ownership of the participatory process.
- Incorporate the vision of experts who can translate the ideas and principles approved in, for example, a climate assembly, into legislative and regulatory measures.
- Democratise the process by incorporating the principles of clear language into its communication.

## CHALLENGE

# HOW CAN WE ENGAGE ALL THOSE WHO WANT TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE IN COLLECTIVE ACTION? NEW FORMS OF SOCIAL MOBILISATION AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION.

## CHALLENGE PROPOSED BY

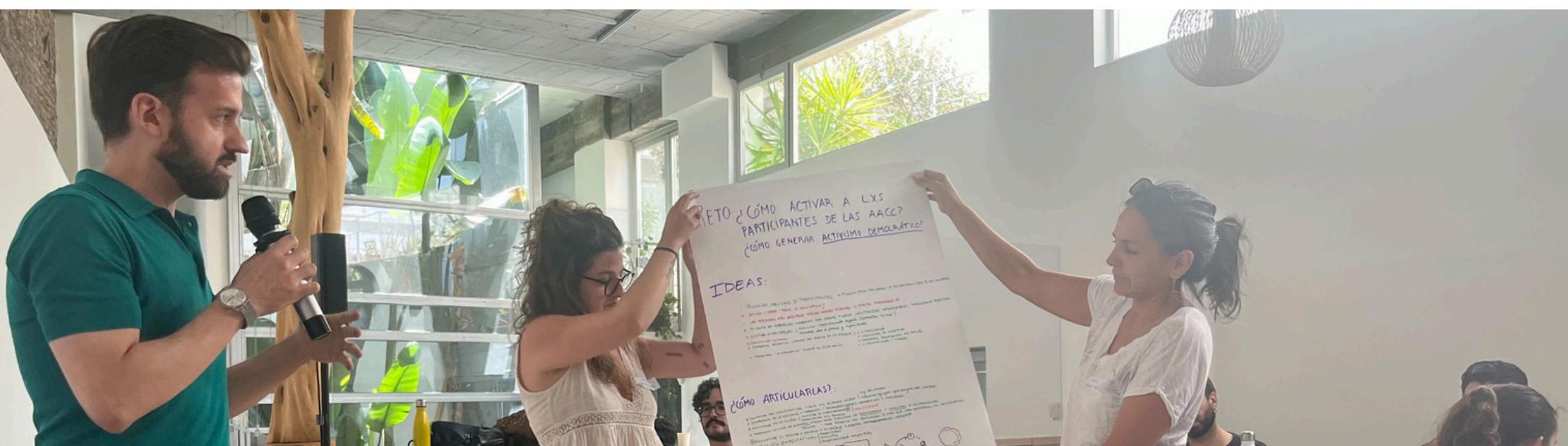
Komons and Hope!

## IDEAS

- 1. Innovate when necessary.** There are many spaces that have existed for years from which calls for collective action are made, and in some cases they are suitable for channelling this mobilisation, but there is also a need to imagine new meeting places.
- 2. Take collective action.** People who mobilise at an individual level move on to collective work in these spaces, with more political and institutional mobilisation. For example, in instances of citizen participation.
- 3. Accompany people.** Not everyone is at the same level of mobilisation and political maturity. We must propose courses of action to people who are beginning to take action in the fight against climate change.

## HOW CAN THESE IDEAS BE ARTICULATED?

- Map existing spaces to determine whether new actions or formats for participation need to be created.
- No more uncoordinated alliances. Networks need to be aligned and have mechanisms for collaboration.
- At the local level, a great deal of collective intelligence is generated on specific actions for collective mobilisation around climate change; these experiences must be connected.



## CHALLENGE

**WHAT DOES SOCIETY THINK ABOUT DEMOCRACY? WHAT WOULD WE LIKE TO KNOW?  
WHO HAS THAT INFORMATION?**

## CHALLENGE PROPOSED BY

More in Common Spain

## IDEAS

1. **Questioning what the data is used for.** Today, data itself is not useful for mobilising or convincing citizens, nor is it useful for confronting narratives. However, this does not prevent it from being a crucial source of information when interacting with policy makers or managing campaigns. In addition, qualitative studies can be used to test messages and narratives.
2. **Data to seek pathways for collective action.** Analysing which issues are central to citizens in defending and mainstreaming democracy can reveal areas of consensus that can be used to build broad alliances. In the current context, it is necessary to identify a minimum programme that appeals to actors who are not currently being counted on.
3. **Do not contribute to survey data inflation.** In Spain, many studies are conducted periodically to gauge public opinion. Therefore, priority should be given to analysing existing data.

## HOW CAN THESE IDEAS BE ARTICULATED?

- Equip the third sector and civil society organisations with tools that enable the analysis and interpretation of opinion poll data.
- Opportunity to use the term 'democracy' as a rallying cry, although it has some limitations.
- Involve actors from different points on the political spectrum in a consensus to defend democracy.

## CHALLENGE

### HOW CAN ANTI-RACISM BE PUT INTO PRACTICE?

#### CHALLENGE PROPOSED BY

Desbordando Democracia

#### IDEAS

- 1. Draw inspiration from previous experiences.** The Popular Legislative Initiative to regularise migrants in Spain is an example of how cross-cutting mobilisation and coordination works, involving actors such as the Church, political parties and trade unions.
- 2. Abandon frameworks that objectify people and nature.** The migrant experience cannot be explained through mercantilist narratives ('they wanted hands, people arrived'). Nor can climate change. Narratives that speak of natural 'resources' must be modified to place the value of nature at the centre.
- 3. Take into account the knowledge and experiences of anti-racist spaces.** Decolonial movements have constructed an epistemological framework that can be adopted against climate collapse.

#### HOW CAN THESE IDEAS BE ARTICULATED?

- Go to spaces where preconceived ideas about knowledge other than the hegemonic are challenged.
- Listen to racialised people who, with their experience of struggle, already have mobilisation strategies.
- Build community in the face of hate speech, so that fear disappears as a tool of power.



## CHLLENGE

### HOW CAN WE GENERATE A BROAD MOVEMENT FOR DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL?

#### CHALLENGE PROPOSED BY

Political Watch (Ampliando Democracia)

#### IDEAS

1. **Bad news for democracy creates an opportunity.** It facilitates consensus on the need to act to defend democracy.
2. **Persuade and convince.** We must attract people with arguments about why democracy is beautiful, but also why it is necessary for the system to continue functioning, which can bring in people who are not currently involved in this struggle.
3. **We will have to prioritise.** We are in a defensive position where it is difficult to move forward and go further. This is a dilemma we face. It is not a question of abandoning struggles, but of extending the democratic agenda to other actors.

#### HOW CAN THESE IDEAS BE ARTICULATED?

- Within the framework of democracy, there are many different people who feel challenged. The challenge is to inspire and mobilise them.
- Be aware that there are actors whom we will never be able to attract.
- Take advantage of the international framework of organisations that are in dialogue with the government and that endorse the need for progress proposed by civil society.

## CHALLENGE

### WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT PARTICIPATION?

#### CHALLENGE PROPOSED BY

Eudemon

#### IDEAS

1. **There are two types of participation:** institutional, top-down, and radicalised, destructive, when there is no space for the former. In view of this, constructive participation must be reinforced, creating spaces where citizens, businesses, etc. can participate from their own sphere, so that everyone feels comfortable being there and speaking.
2. **We must moderate and facilitate.** The co-opting of spaces by specific individuals and organisations must be avoided, working on the co-design of high standards of inclusivity and accessibility.

#### HOW CAN THESE IDEAS BE ARTICULATED?

- Avoid participation that is merely performative, that has no impact and only serves to 'check off' an administrative or regulatory process. Channels and processes must have a real influence on decision-making.
- Diversify the content and approach to be addressed in participatory processes. In the climate sphere, there are opportunities to deliberate on the implementation of renewables, but there are other issues that are also urgent and have tangible effects that could be opened up to greater and better participation.
- It is also necessary to encourage internal reflection within civil society organisations themselves on what is meant by participation and how this concept can be promoted while influencing specific public policies.

# CONCLUSIONS

The meeting made it clear that **mainstreaming democracy is not an optional extra, but an essential condition for tackling the major challenges of our time**: the climate emergency, social inequalities and the resurgence of authoritarian rhetoric.

Democracy is strengthened when it connects with people's daily lives, when it becomes inclusive, and when it manages to bring together diverse struggles into a common project. The task ahead is to turn these reflections into **sustained and collaborative actions** capable of generating real impact on public policy and renewing public trust.

At **Political Watch**, we reaffirm our commitment to continue working in this direction. This event was not an isolated occurrence, but rather part of an ongoing, open conversation that we want to maintain and expand. We aspire to continue building collaboratively with actors from different sectors, both at the national and international levels.

The challenge is great, but so is the opportunity: **to forge broader alliances, share resources, and keep collective energy alive** so that democracy becomes a cross-cutting theme in all transformative agendas.

To conclude this report, we would like to thank all the individuals and organisations that participated in the meeting. The challenge ahead of us is enormous, but we have the most important thing: **the enthusiasm and hope that we can collectively build fairer democracies for all people**.

*September, 2025*

# ANNEX I

## PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

- Alianza por el Clima
- Alimentta
- Asamblea Antirracistas Madrid
- Col·legi de professionals de la ciència política i la sociologia de Catalunya
- Consultoría independiente
- Demos Lab
- Desbordando Democracia (Espacio Afro)
- EAPN Madrid
- European Climate Foundation
- Ecodes
- Equipo Europa
- EUDEMON
- Foro Transiciones
- Fundación Renovables
- GOBT
- Greenpeace España y Portugal
- Hexagonal
- Hope!
- Komons
- More in Common
- OsOigo
- Platoniq
- Plaza de los pueblos
- Political Watch
- Provivienda
- Red de Municipios por la Agroecología y Entrepueblos
- Red Española para el Desarrollo Sostenible (REDS-SDSN Spain)
- REVO Prosperidad Sostenible
- Salud por Derecho
- SOS Racismo Madrid
- Talento para el Futuro
- The Data Tank
- Transparencia Internacional España

# **ANNEX I**

## **Programme of the event**

- 10:30 - Welcome and introduction. Why this event? What brings us here?
- 10:45 - Context analysis
- 11:00 - Experiences, initiatives and reflections on mainstreaming democracy in different sectors, especially in the climate and environmental fields.
- 12:45 - Action to enhance impact and idea generation: work on specific challenges where collective intelligence can be channelled to enhance projects and generate new ideas.
- 14:15 - Next steps.
- 14:45 - Closing remarks.



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