

Magna Charta for an International League of Democratic Cities

Preamble

This is the first draft of a new Magna Charta for a new era of democracy.

It is also an open and ongoing invitation to people all over the world: to join together in a new and great collaboration to make our cities more democratic.

This invitation was first written in the city of Rome, on 29 September 2018. We, its original authors, are hundreds of people from more than 200 cities, 80 countries, and six continents who gathered inside Rome's city hall for a free and public forum, the Global Forum on Modern Direct Democracy.

We citizens, activists, scholars, journalists, local officials, election administrators, scientists, teachers, entrepreneurs, farmers and many others—gathered in Rome at a time of great concern and anxiety about democratic decline at the national level in many countries.

But as we talked over four days, we saw an entirely different story at the local level. Cities around the globe are working hard to become more democratic and to invent new ways for people to participate. We saw groundbreaking work on participation firsthand in the city of Rome, and shared examples of new ideas and democratic gains from Brisbane to Bern, Sao Paulo to Seoul, and Tunis to Taichung.

We learned so much that we wanted to commit to keep learning, and to keep sharing this work. So this invitation, this Magna Charta seeks to bring cities all over the world into the conversation, and to formalize this learning and sharing with a new organization that is at once global and intensely local.

This is thus a charter for a new International League of Democracy Cities. In Rome, we agreed to distribute this charter now around the world. Through this open process, you are asked to offer your suggestions, ideas, amendments, and especially the signatures of you, your fellow citizens and the city, town or local jurisdictions in which you live and work.

What is a democracy city? This is the question we asked ourselves in Rome, and here are some of the answers we came up with.

The Charter

First of all, we believe that democracy cities are places where people never stop working to become more democratic.

Democracy cities are searchers. They experiment. They seek ways, new and old, proven and unproven, to deepen participation. Democracy cities are never satisfied with today's democratic advances—because they are too busy working on tomorrow's.

A democracy city seeks to create physical spaces where people can be with each other, discuss with each other, and make democratic decisions together, freely and safely. In democracy cities, these spaces may take any number of forms, from previously abandoned buildings, to libraries, to schools, to streets reclaimed from brutal traffic, to centers that are explicitly houses of democracy.

A democracy city is a place where citizens – be they the city's elected officials, staff, or volunteers – are always available to assist people when they seek to participate.

A democracy city is a place where citizens can make decisions upon any topic or issue upon which politicians can decide. Citizens and politicians are equals.

A democracy city is always developing infrastructure – human, physical, digital infrastructure—for participation and democracy. And a democracy city works to make that infrastructure is open and transparent – so that the infrastructure can itself be refined and altered by the people to better serve democracy and participation.

In a democracy city, the rules for participation and democracy are decided by the people themselves. And a democracy city protects its democratic practices and procedures from national governments that would seek to overrule or void its democracy.

A democracy city works not only to educate and train youth for democracy but also to give young people, even those not old enough in the vote, real democratic power, especially over the issues that affect them most.

A democracy city is a place where people can connect with neighbors and strangers alike as they nurture and create social movements that change the world.

In a democracy city, citizens work together to participate not just at the neighborhood and local level but to find ways to participate at the regional, national and transnational levels of democracy.

A democracy city supports sustainability through participatory instruments because there's no future democracy without sustainability.

A democracy city encourages people to participate in decision-making in every step of developing policymaking – from proposals, to research, to debate, to the decision in the end.

A democracy city requires resources to implement what citizens have decided upon, and citizens need to be able to understand and control how those resources are spent

A democracy city allows voters to cast their ballots with ease, and there should be no discrimination about the technology used. Rather, a democracy city should support the integration of traditional voting and electronic voting in ways that are secure, build trust, and follow best international practices.

Elections in a democracy city include all people, residents and stakeholders, including those who might be excluded by national governments.

Although elections are necessary, a democracy city and its people know that elections are not enough. A democracy city listens to all voices in the time between elections.

A democracy city doesn't just permit citizens to offer their ideas for legislation, constitutions, regulation or other aspects of the city. Such a city welcomes proposals, seeks out these ideas, and helps citizens fashion their ideas into accessible formats for consideration of the people.

A democracy city guarantees its people the power to propose and enact laws (regulations) and constitutions (charters) themselves, via tools of modern direct democracy like initiative and referendum, and via tools of participatory democracy, like participatory budgeting. Democracy cities design these tools in ways that encourage deliberation and participation by everyone.

A democracy city seeks to make accessible all tools necessary for citizenship in reliable digital spaces.

A democracy city protects the rights of minorities and seeks diverse representation and parity between genders, races, ages, and geographies not just in elected office or staff but in public participation as well.

A democracy city has diverse and reliable sources of news and context to help the people govern themselves.

A democracy city is a place of happy losers. That means that, after a decision is taken, the losing side in the debate feels like they were heard, and had a fair chance to participate.

And while a democracy city takes its own path to greater democracy, a democracy city is also eager to learn lessons from other cities.

This is why democracy cities need an International League of Democracy Cities.

In Rome, we envisioned many possibilities for such a network of cities—annual reporting and assessment of democracy-building; the sharing of data, tools and experiences via online and on-site meetings with other network members, and even exchange programs between cities for staff and citizens working on democracy. We hope that you can envision even more.

How to Sign the Charter and Join the League

The building of this network of democracy cities starts now.

This new Magna Charta will circulate the world for one year. We ask that you share it with your city and with anyone who would be interested. To convey suggestions for edits of this charter, please email: info@2019globalforum.com

And if your city is willing to sign the new Magna Charta and/or join the new International League of Democracy Cities, please email: info@2019globalforum.com

Next year, 2-5 October 2019, in the city of Taichung, Taiwan, there will be another free and public Global Forum to consider this Magna Charta. The whole world is invited to join this gathering. Suggestions, ideas and notes of supports from citizens and cities will be incorporated into the document and the International League of Democracy Cities will be officially launched.

But this will not be a final version of this Magna Charta, or of the International League. This will be a new beginning. This charter and this league will evolve and incorporate the ideas of cities and citizens as they join and shape it.

This is as it should be. Because no one has the final word in a democracy city. Democracy is a conversation that never ends.