

# **The RWF and Compass *Everyday Democratization* initiative**

## **Introduction**

If we wish to be co-operative, environmentally sustainable, egalitarian or democratic, where are we to go? To address this question the *Everyday Democratisation* project will shine a light on the growing number of diverse activities now being developed to democratise aspects of everyday life, beyond the sphere of formal politics.

While the sphere of formal politics undoubtedly requires significant reform, there is now a growing realisation that forms of everyday life also need to become more responsive and democratically and environmentally sustainable. What would it mean to democratize our food system? Our media? The technologies we now increasingly rely on? Or even to democratise our arts and cultural activities?

This new initiative sets out to raise awareness of the possibilities and difficulties of everyday democratization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It will involve a wide-ranging investigation and detailed analysis of the contemporary landscape; engaging practitioners and making new connections between key actors; sparking fresh public conversations and new thinking about what it means to democratize UK society today.

The Everyday Democracy initiative will also shine new light on the many obstacles that currently hinder the on-going development of these emerging alternatives. While some of these obstacles are technical in nature, the great majority relate to the many forms of dysfunctional power that persistently exert regressive forms of control over the vast majority of peoples' everyday lives.

By shining a light both on these obstacles and on alternative ways of organising, this new project will look to redraw the frontiers of contemporary popular struggle around processes of everyday democratisation.

To maximise the impact of this new initiative the Raymond Williams Foundation has provided seed funding for Nick Mahony to work on developing this project in 2017. To maximize the impact of this seed funding Nick Mahony has already undertaken a pilot phase of this new initiative in collaboration with the Progressive Alliance (PA) project in order to assess its potential and develop a set of proposals and a plan for its further development. The PA project is convened by the campaigning group / think tank Compass with the goal of forging an alliance of progressive political parties and civil society groups and thereby increase the chances of progressive actors winning elections, enacting much needed reforms to the UK's electoral system as well as addressing the political, social and environmental crises that we are now living through.

The everyday democratization initiative will complement and enhance the PA project by:

- Mapping and analysing the everyday democratization landscape in the UK in order to inform the PA projects broader democratization strategy
- Involving practitioners and organisations in the development of a cross-sectoral vision and agenda for the medium and long-term development of everyday democratization processes in the UK
- Involving mainstream *progressive* political parties, civil society organisations and media actors in efforts to promote this vision and agenda to their networks and public supporters
- Engaging mainstream progressive parties and civil society organisations in the active support of the on-going development of the field of everyday democratization, by providing new networks through which knowledge and insights about everyday democratization can be disseminated and by translating these insights to help continue to democratize these organisations.

Working together between October and December 2016, the RWF and Compass have now completed a small-scale pilot research exercise involving:

- With the aim of beginning to map the landscape, a short bout of investigative research was undertaken focusing on a sample of sectors where it is known everyday democratization projects are being developed
- An initial analysis of material collected, leading to the identification of key issues at stake and a more substantive project proposal for further research and project development

As a result of this pilot research, ten realms of everyday democratization activity have been identified as deserving of further attention as a result of this pilot research. These are:

- (i) Technology
- (ii) Arts and Culture
- (iii) Food
- (iv) The housing system
- (v) Education
- (vi) Environmental protection and environmental sustainability (including water and energy systems)
- (vii) Media
- (viii) Work, workplace, business, finance, intellectual property
- (ix) Community, local government and public services
- (x) Sport and leisure

A set of four deep-rooted and intersecting obstacles to everyday democratization were also identified as a result of undertaking this pilot research. These obstacles are important as the research identified that they are already stymying the development of democratisation activities in everyday settings and will therefore be crucial to address as part of this projects ongoing development. The four obstacles are:

- (i) The increasing concentration of private ownership and the centralization of governance, power and control and the relation between these and rising levels of economic inequality
- (ii) The various socio-cultural hierarchies that continue to exist and which underwrite many forms of discrimination and exclusion including: racism, patriarchy, ageism as well as forms of discrimination based on what counts as ‘good’ taste, ‘civilized’ behavior, or appropriate forms of communication.
- (iii) Environmental degradation
- (iv) The massification of society and the relation between this and peoples’ everyday experiences of societal patterns and forms that both require the existence of such a mass and the sidelining of expectations for more participative, publicly responsive and involving forms of democratic political governance.

Given these obstacles as well as many other considerable difficulties that the development of everyday democratization projects undeniably face, the sense of movement, process and possibility that the pilot research found to currently exist across this landscape of practice is both exciting and inspiring. Some highlights from this preliminary research have been selected below and are presented in realm-by-realm form.

<i>Democratizing</i> <b>TECHNOLOGY</b>	
Emerging ecosystem of <b>‘platform co-ops’</b>	Platform co-op advocates critique mainstream ‘platform economy’, highlighting unfulfilled promises and calling for the development of fairer alternatives. A wide spectrum of activities, experimenting with many forms of social relationship and social organization, including forms of collective ownership, governance and control. Most current cases operating in retail and service sectors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Links between these activities and work on ‘building the commons’, including projects that are working to realize forms of peer-to-peer production but also work on new tech for exchanging value, such as Blockchain; or accrediting peers online, eg. Mozilla Badging.</li> </ul>
Using tech to <b>democratize political activism and campaigning</b>	E.g. Avaaz and 38 degrees; Loomio and D-Cent
Emergence of <b>‘progressive’ alternative media platforms</b>	E.g. Bectu launching ‘progressive TV’ in 2017; Outlets such as Canary and Navarra
Work on the <b>democratization of media forms and formats</b>	E.g. more participative media formats: including interactive documentaries such as HighRise or Media Re-Mix tools e.g. Palestine Re-mix by Al Jazeera

<b>Free software movement</b>	
<b>Democratisation of tech design and production</b>	E.g. DIY book scanning; RepRap – 3D printing project that allows people to use a 3D printer to print out another 3D printer; OpenSource Ecology Group – excellent US initiative to democratize house-building; Projects are considering how possibilities for democratization being opened out by different forms of automation e.g. of transportation
<b>Links to mainstream political parties</b>	E.g. Corbyn’s 2016 ‘digital democracy manifesto’ authored by Richard Barbrook.
<p><i>Democratising ARTS &amp; CULTURE</i></p> <p>[Interviews conducted with: Judith Knight, Director of Arts Admin; Lois Keiden, Director of Live Arts Development Agency; David Toop, musician, writer and academic; Lois Weaver, artist and academic; Jordan McKenzie, artist and academic; Emmy Minton, Development at Duckie; Jane Trowell, Platform]</p>	
<b>Cost and benefits</b>	Working class contribute more to the arts, through the National Lottery, than anyone else. They are also often the people that benefit least. Dominant regime not fit for purpose, even on its own terms.
<b>Role of arts/culture in democratization processes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to be a test-bed for experimentation and innovation over many decades, using notions of audience, public, artist, expert, collaboration, cooperation etc as jumping-off points for many different kinds of exploratory and participative work.</li> <li>- Arts as one of the vital spaces needed for popular learning about what it means to collaborate, talk, listen, cooperate, engage with difference, move beyond cliques etc.</li> <li>- Huge variety of examples of experiential democratization related projects, including both historical precedents and contemporary projects spanning live art, music, theatre, film etc.</li> <li>- RWF also currently working with National Trust to revive history of certain properties being used to open up access to formal and informal forms of adult and democratic education</li> </ul>
<b>Felt need for networking and alliance building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desire expressed for more exchange between arts and non-arts based progressive practitioners, professionals, organisations and students and between them and progressive publics.</li> <li>- Arts students also huge potential constituency here, as there is a strong perception that many are being failed by current system. Many are therefore restlessly looking for more socially-engaged and progressive alternatives.</li> <li>- Arts funding models also bust, according to respondents, and therefore also need to be re-thought.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Democratising THE FOOD SYSTEM</i></p>	

<b>Emergence of alternative food and food democracy movement:</b>	<p>We are living at a time when there has been a triumph of consumerism and ideas of consumer choice but also a time when the contemporary food system faces a series of unprecedented challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Climate change, ecosystem disruption and soil damage</li> <li>- Contemporary food system is major cause of ill health and early death</li> </ul> <p>Against this background, the current food system presents some difficult challenges for democracy, as government is reluctant to confront consumers and even more reluctant to confront employers since over 3.5 million people are employed today in the UK food sector (only a very small percentage of which are farmers).</p> <p>‘Food democracy’ is a term coined by Professor Tim Lang, of City University in this context, to reflect on the need - and the potential - of ordinary people to get together to change the social and material relations enacted through contemporary food systems. There are many debates it is designed to draw attention to including issues of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Access, security, quality, distribution, re-localisation, sovereignty, organic food and eventually handing power to the demos and creating food systems guided by citizens instead of solely controlled by corporations.</li> <li>b. Market power leading to unsustainable levels of pollution, food safety problems, unequal access to healthy food.</li> <li>c. Need for alliance with orgs and actors in other sectors, in order to struggle more collectively for social and environmental justice – food democracy has material, biological, cultural and societal dimensions.</li> </ol>
<b>Activities, organisations and networks:</b>	<p>The civil society network in food is made up of a vast network of NGOs and civil society organisations. Those asserting calling for greater food democracy stress the need to re-gain rights for citizens and for greater public control over the food system. They should be opposed, according to Tim Lang, to food banks and other similar remedial measures, which are no more than sticking plasters propping up a failing system (see Fabian Commission on Poverty in the food system).</p> <p>Current development that have significant potential to be further developed include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fair Trade for Britain movement</li> <li>- Sustain – alliance of food system reform groups, led by Cath Dalmiri</li> <li>- Good Food Nation - Scotland</li> <li>- Nourish – Scotland</li> <li>- Oxford Real Farming Movement (‘very Compass ish’)</li> </ul> <p>Tim Lang believes the three priorities for campaigners and ultimately for government need to be:</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To decentralize power – ‘bioregionalisation’ and the regionalization of food democracy</li> <li>2. To resurrect the proposals first set out in the ‘Food 2030’ report, published in January 2010, which offers a clear direction for food policy and which Tim Lang claims around half of the food industry are already very sympathetic to.</li> <li>3. To instigate a massive campaign to change the British diet – to meet public health needs; engage the public with the process of re-engineering the British diet.</li> </ol> <p>The Living Wage Campaign led by Citizens UK has already also been absolutely critical and very focused on food policy too. Likewise, the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain, constituted for and by the largely dispossessed and abandoned, low-paid migrant workers that keeps the food system going in the UK has been very effective too.</p> <p>Key question: why should food be cheap when producing cheap food will always be dependent on cheap labour? 3.5 million people working in food sector characterized by cheap labour. What is a ‘good food culture’ and how do we realize this? This should perhaps be the key question for the public to debate and make decisions about in a democratic way?</p> <p>Tim Lang is currently producing a new paper setting out these issues in more detail, with Prof Terry Marston (Uni of Cardiff) and Prof Erik Millstone (Uni of Sussex).</p>
<b>Other activities:</b>	- food co-ops, sustainable farming practices, alternative agricultural financing models, social supermarkets, anti-food-waste projects and new food democracy oriented institutions (such as Toronto Food Policy Council).
<b>Water:</b>	Water – Naples ‘Department of the Commons’; Barcelona et Comu’s recent renationalization of the water system and the Dakota Pipeline campaign, all highlight some of the different forms recent contestations and developments concerning water are taking.
<i>Democratising</i> <b>THE HOUSING SYSTEM</b>	
<b>Crisis in UK housing system spurring many new projects as well as the re-consideration of different aspects of our existing housing system</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Co-operatives springing up to respond to: existence of empty office space, undeveloped sites, homelessness, appetite for self-build, possibilities of open-source building tech</li> <li>- Transition by Design team currently actively building alliance/movement of UK practitioners working on this</li> <li>- Recent ‘House of the Commons’ conference in Oxford worked to bring people active in this area together</li> </ul>
<i>Democratising</i> <b>THE ENVIRONMENT (INCLUDING THE WATER AND ENERGY SYSTEMS)</b>	

<b>Historical dimensions</b>	<p>For several decades now environmental groups have been key when it comes to developing and extending the relevance of our democratic institutions, by pushing them to protect various aspects of our environment, our health and our planning system etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Radical environmental justice groups have pioneered many of the political campaigning techniques that have now entered mainstream activism, esp around local campaigning, but around international issues too. ]</li> <li>- These processes have brought many people into politics, raised consciousness and changed minds etc.</li> <li>- Activism/participation/public ownership of environmental issues vital, not an add-on, must be democratic process of change.</li> </ul>
<b>Two current projects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Switched on London – aims to bring London’s energy system into public hands, to ensure it’s environmental sustainability and to democratize its governance. Sadiq Khan has engaged, tho the extent to which it will be supported by City Hall is currently not clear.</li> <li>- Climate Conversations, encourages people to interact around climate change problem by the Climate Psychology Alliance</li> </ul>
<b><i>Democratisation and CO-OPS</i></b>	
<b>Historical context</b>	The cooperative movement has had a vital role in the struggle for social justice and the development of social democracy itself and the movement continues to press for and win reforms today
<b>Models</b>	<p>Two models continue to evolve:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Larger coops – representative institutions, act on behalf of members in order to deliver fairer outcomes</li> <li>b. Smaller coops – more participatory, about process and politics of doing as much as the equity of outcomes</li> </ol>
<b>Experimentation</b>	The governance of coops and the forms of social relations they enact are experimented with on an ongoing basis. Role of stakeholders, members, ‘leaders’ etc. Culture of coops – scale and approach to public engagement / mentoring.
<b>Support required</b>	More resources required for training in how to start coops and for education about history and ongoing development of coops – some of which already provided by Co-ops UK.
<b><i>Democratising MEDIA</i></b>	
<b>Concentration of power</b>	Currently there’s a massive concentration of power and a lack of any effective system of public regulation, with this leading to an atmosphere of fear, apathy and alienation amongst journalists.
Media Reform Coalition	Leading work on forging an alliance of media reformers, the MRC aims to democratize media in the UK. Annual ‘Media

	Democracy Festival' now in its 2 <sup>nd</sup> year. Also recently undertaken 'media democracy roadshow' that's toured UK, offering training and education about these issues.
<b>MediaFund</b>	Crowdfunder to support alternative media and to support alternative media producers in a more organised and coordinated way.
<b>Precarity and lack of diversity</b>	Key issues being addressed by growing number of organisations e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Media Diversified – innovative outreach work to BME communities/new writers/new partners</li> <li>- Precarious Workers Brigage bridging conversations between arts/cultural industry workers and media workers (highlighting growing divisions between paid/unpaid workers/volunteers</li> <li>- New models being tested and citizen journalism and amateur contributions being fostered</li> </ul>
<b><i>Democratising EDUCATION</i></b>	
<b>Critique of dominant forms of education increasingly strong</b>	Students, education professionals, adult educational charities such as RWF all pressing for a reassessment of current educational policies and practices – not effective in many ways, even on their own terms
<b>Activities currently highly dispersed and fragmented</b>	Lots happening on this, with activities ranging from long-standing niche work in particular domains, to recent online experiments, to work being undertaken by unions and many activist projects. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- RWF and others have been instrumental in raising profile of informal self-organised educational initiatives, such the growing network of 'discussion circles' and 'philosophy in pubs' groups, as well as self-organised residential educational events, such as DemFest.</li> <li>- Phoenix Educational Trust – organization with specific remit to promote democratic educational initiatives</li> </ul>
<b><i>Democratising WORK, WORKPLACE, BUSINESS, FINANCE, INTELLECTUAL PROERTY</i></b>	
<b>Work/workplace</b>	Growing interest in new and emerging models of work and in how to translate aspirations for greater democratization, greater equity, horizontal org models and social solidarity into 21 <sup>st</sup> Century workplaces and business practices.
<b>Economics</b>	<a href="http://www.rethinkeconomics.org/">http://www.rethinkeconomics.org/</a>
<b><i>Democratising COMMUNITY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT</i></b>	

<b>New network / alliance for the democratization of local government in Scotland</b>	<a href="http://www.ourdemocracy.scot">www.ourdemocracy.scot</a>
<i>Democratising <b>SPORT and LEISURE</b></i>	
<b>TBC</b>	

The table above starts to offer a glimpse of some of the changing contours and characteristics of this fast changing, lively and varied landscape of everyday democratisation.

A preliminary analysis of this as well as a significant amount of other material collected as part of the pilot exercise has led to the emergence of four key preliminary research findings. Together these findings offer both a set of preliminary insights and a sense of direction for further research and the continued development of this new project.

### **Key findings from the pilot research:**

This preliminary research has begun the work of *revealing* a landscape that is not readily visible until these processes begin to be viewed as part of a single field. The work of revealing and starting to map this landscape is not only potentially valuable because it can offer a practical way of comparing and connecting what's happening in different areas, it is also valuable because it opens up the possibility of assessing whether some of what is being pre-figured across this landscape should potentially be taken greater notice of and even translated across to the formal political realm.

On a slightly less abstract and more granular level, the following four findings have also emerged from this pilot research:

#### **1. The process of everyday democratization is currently being approached and developed in a very wide variety of ways.**

The activity of beginning to survey this contemporary field has started to reveal both some of the large number of ideas, approaches and forms of practice currently being tested out and some of the equally varied range of sites and contexts of thinking and practice where these activities are being pursued.

Some projects are oriented to the reform of existing practices, others have been set up with more transformative goals in mind. There is also a broader set of tensions evident in this field between various ways of understanding the *means* (how everyday democratization activities should be enacted) and their *ends* (the impact they are looking to achieve overall). Given the diversity of contexts and the equally varied histories from which different projects emerge, these variations will need to be treated with sensitivity, as well as subjected to more detailed analysis as this project develops.

A larger-scale mapping exercise would enable these and other qualities of everyday democratisation projects to be more comprehensively documented and compared. This work could support a broader and more informed debate about the possibilities and challenges of these developments and about what is at stake in the instigation of such practices in new settings.

**2. It is important to recognize the many ways that contemporary publics are located in relation to these developments.**

Levels of participation amongst different groups, unequal societal conditions and long-standing cultural biases all have a significant effect on levels of public engagement in formal democratic procedures. The ongoing existence of racism, patriarchy and ageism, as well as increasing levels of economic inequality, are all examples of factors that blight the immediate prospects of the successful democratization in the UK. These and other such factors impact on the current effectiveness and future potential of everyday democratization projects too.

Future work will therefore need to take steps to address and help mitigate these and other long-standing patterns of prejudice and social marginalisation. To do this it will be useful to engage with existing organisations that specifically focus on pushing back against these kinds of obstacles, such as Black Lives Matter, The Womens Party and Age UK, for example.

**3. One further concern this initiative will need to address relates to the issue of how formal democratic institutions and procedures and more everyday forms of democratization can (and should) relate to each other.**

The pilot research indicates that there is currently a wide range of perspectives in play on this issue. Dominant and orthodox understandings of mainstream politics currently position formal democratic institutions and procedures in a hierarchical relationship with more everyday forms of democratic practice, which still tend to be seen as having a less important democratic role in society overall. Such understandings have long pervaded Westminster-centric forms of politics, which usually take political parties, Parliament and periodic elections as being of 'first order' significance, thereby assuming that more everyday forms of democracy are of only

‘second-order’ value.

The everyday democratization initiative has the potential to reinvigorate public debate about the relationship between more established and more everyday democratic forms. A scaled-up version of this research will offer possibilities to highlight different ways of organizing these relationships and showing what might potentially be gained by placing everyday and more established forms of democracy on a more equal footing.

Significant benefits could also be realized from greater boundary crossing and networking between progressives who are already involved in ongoing work aimed at realising democratic reforms in each of these – formal and more everyday - realms.

**4. Significant enthusiasm exists among many of those already contacted as part of this research for greater networking, support and cooperation across this sector.**

Enthusiasm has also been expressed for greater networking between everyday democratisation projects and organisations that are working to reform formal democratic institutions and procedures. Actors involved in everyday democratization projects are, furthermore, looking to raise their public profile and increase their engagement with the general public as well.

*To date no other project or organization has yet been identified that is researching and promoting the everyday democratization sector as a whole. A significant and perhaps time-limited opportunity therefore currently exists to lead and co-ordinate this work.*

The pilot research indicates that there is a latent desire amongst practitioners for greater infrastructural support, cross-boundary working and for the more sustained and public promotion of these developments.

**Next steps – a proposal developing and scaling-up the Everyday Democratisation initiative in the next six months (January – June 2017)**

Time-frame	Activities	Outcomes
January – February 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Further desk research and interviews with practitioners to develop more detailed insight into current activities being developed across the 11 realms of everyday democratization</li><li>- Liaison with designer to explore ways of presenting the information and insights being generated about this sector in the form of an</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- More detailed preliminary mapping of the contemporary landscape of everyday democratization as it is emerging within and across the 11 realms</li><li>- A set of options and practical possibilities for presenting the research in a publicly accessible and useful way</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- interactive ‘map’</li> <li>- Investigate the feasibility of bringing together a group of practitioners from across a sample of the 11 realms to meet as a cross-sectoral group, to be convened by RWF and Compass PA project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identification of a set of reliable and enthusiastic contacts/representatives selected from across the 11 realms who are interested in beginning to cultivate a stronger network of links across the sector</li> </ul>
March-April 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Publication of short pamphlet or media piece to publicise this initiative and the idea of ‘everyday democratisation’</li> <li>- Launch of prototype online interactive map of the everyday democratization landscape in the UK</li> <li>- First meeting convened of the ‘everyday democratisation’ group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pamphlet or media piece initiates process of public engagement with the RWF/Compass PA ‘everyday democratization’ initiative</li> <li>- Online map begins to offer accessible public resource that can continue to develop and be improved</li> <li>- First meeting of ‘everyday democratisation’ group starts to identify a set of key priorities for the ongoing development of the sector</li> </ul>
May – June 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organise and convene larger-scale meeting of practitioners in the sector</li> <li>- As well as supporting information sharing and networking, this meeting would be an opportunity to solicit feedback on the pamphlet, map and set of priorities for the ongoing development of the sector</li> <li>- Present findings of this phase of the initiative to key people involved in campaigns to reform formal democratic institutions and procedures, media actors and relevant academics. Invite panel of key actors to respond to findings of everyday initiative at the DemFest (festival of democracy) in June.</li> <li>- Develop funding bids with a view to securing financial support for the continuation of this project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The initial formation of a cross-sectoral network of actors involved in everyday democratization from across the 11 realms</li> <li>- The identification of how the pamphlet/promotional material, map/web resource and the agenda for development can all be revised and improved</li> <li>- Improved understanding of how the everyday democratization initiative should be positioned and presented in relation to other important ongoing political reform activities and presentation of key insights generated by this initiative at DemFest</li> <li>- Implementation of strategy designed to secure the ongoing financial sustainability of this initiative.</li> </ul>