

Democracy, engagement and the energy transition.

Working paper

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'Enlightenment means that man leaves behind his self-inflicted immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use your mind without the guidance of another. This immaturity is your own fault when the cause is not a lack of reason, but a lack of determination and courage to make use of it without the guidance of others..

Kant, Immanuel (1784), Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?

Abstract

One objective of the EU Reformers project is citizens engagement. But there are many well-intentioned actions by volunteers or civil servants working on the energy transition, with the result that enthusiastic people who were already planning to take measures participate, but that a larger part of the silent majority feels threatened, drops out and votes for extreme parties. Those parties then break sustainability with national regulation and laws. In addition, various forces in the media play a role, how new techniques are chosen and the way in which people communicate with each other with forms of propaganda. These aspects of the energy transition are discussed based on literature, after which it is evaluated based on 'the eternal struggle between state and society' in today's representative democracy. That democracy has limited possibilities to become a healthy society with enlightened citizens acting for a sustainable world. The energy transition is pre-eminently a collective issue that affects every citizen and in certain situations lends itself to deliberative democracy as a supplement to representative democracy. This paper is a first attempt to bridge the gap between the philosophy of recent Nobel Prize winners in economics and the approach to energy transition, with participation as a solution with a citizens assembly on energy embedded in representative democracy as one of the most desirable solutions. To a certain extent, the participation ladder can also be used, considering Rogers' innovation theory. Detailed implementation tools are no part of this paper.

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Introduction

Democracy seems to be in danger. Terms like fake news, politicians who lie, an American new president had little time to campaign because he is busy with lawsuits. He wins the elections, and the environmental rules of his predecessor go into the trash. This changes every 4 years. In the Netherlands, this sometimes takes a little longer. In 1983, a broad national discussion about energy ended. Costs of the discussion then

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more than f 27 million¹. Recommendation; no nuclear energy and commitment to sustainable energy. The latter happened sparingly, and the government slowed only down a bit for nuclear energy after the Chernobyl disaster. In the meantime, nuclear energy came up again every now and then. At first the VVD (liberal party) brought a nuclear power plant again on the agenda. Now an investigation is about 4 plants². A heat pump was seen as a good solution. Now the winner³ of the elections shouts that he is happy that those 'idiotic things' have been removed from the agenda. In The Hague (government), energy companies and municipalities are arguing for more government money because the construction of large scale district heating is stagnating⁴ in an nearly monopoly market⁵. In short, what to do with politics seeing the increasing weather change with all the disasters?

This paper tries to highlight several aspects in an analysis with a proposal to arrive at better approach for the energy transition using additional democratic means. The core is to leave behind the *immaturity caused by the citizens themselves*. *Immaturity is the inability to use your mind without the guidance of another (Kant Enlightenment)* In short enlightenment for citizens who maybe seem to too much a lazy consumer which Kant was already afraid of.

Thei paper contains 4 paragrap.

1. 'Challenges to democracy' discusses the targeted influences from mainly wealthy libertarian parties that support think tanks and other activities. This is mainly happening in and from the US, as with Brexit. Recently this became more apparent when Musk, who already has a lot of influence with Trump, also started to influence European politics⁶. With that, rich people lobbying for their interests, which until now happened behind the scenes, seems to be even more normal. However, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Finally, more parties take advantage of the dissatisfaction in the majority with propaganda for a less green policy.
2. 'The eternal struggle between state and society (Acemoglu & Johnson , 2023)' and deliberative democracy' indicates the fields of power between citizens or society and the state, including the influence of large companies. The citizen acts and are treated too much as a consumer (is lazy as Kant stated) which

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¹https://www.kernenergiein nederland.nl/faceted_search/results/taxonomy%3A249

² <https://nos.nl/artikel/2511577-tweede-kamer-wil-vier-grote-kerncentrales-in-plaats-van-twee>

³ <https://nos.nl/video/2521438-wilders-haalt-warmtepomp-aan-tegenover-energiewoordvoerder-bontenbal>

⁴ <https://www.rtl.nl/nieuws/economie/artikel/5451377/warmtenetten-moeten-meer-subsidies-krijgen-vinden-duurzame>

⁵ <https://www.rtl.nl/nieuws/economie/artikel/5486003/energiereuzen-vragen-ook-2025-het-maximale-dat-ze-mogen-voor-warmte>

⁶ <https://nos.nl/artikel/2548739-musk-spreekt-met-brexit-populist-farage-over-grote-donatie>

gives the state more and more influence. Attempts are being made⁷ to improve this, but at the local level for the energy transition, this is only succeeding sparingly. To gain a better understanding of this, civil society is dissected a little further to arrive at criteria for deliberative democracy.

3. 'From vision to implementation' brings together the insights from the previous paragraphs to provide an impetus for making a good choice for an implementation trajectory for an energy transition. A starting point is the well-known participation ladder with on top the citizen assembly.
4. The conclusion of this exploratory paper on a general level paper leaves many recommendations for further research

1. Challenges to democracy

This paragraph examines.

1. With 'Democracy for sale' how large budgets for election campaigns affect society, in which information technology and new communication systems play an essential role.
2. Propaganda and the idea of self-government, that was already described by Plato in the time of the Greeks is discussed in this section. What remains of Kant's Enlightenment and independent thinking about sustainability without the guidance of third parties like influencers.
3. It follows that it is important who has the power and the possibilities to give direction to the ever-newer production systems and means of communication.
4. A model for democracy and the energy transition concludes this paragraph.

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1.1 Democracy for sale in libertarian society

'Democracy for sale' describes the growth of right-wing populism in Europe and the increasing international, difficult to follow money flows (Geoghegan, 2020). These resources often come from powerful right-wing American mostly Christian groups that have supported campaigns from Latin America to Eastern Europe and in the US itself. 'The delusion of the crowds why people get mad in groups the crowds' (Bernstein, 2021) describes why people go crazy in groups with hype behavior. Temporarily excessive media attention makes something seem more important than it really is. A self-reinforcing mechanism can arise that makes a negligible trifle grow into an important item. 'Religion and the rise of capitalism' (Friedman, 2021) indicates the influence religion can have on a society. The focus of 'Democracy for sale' is limited to the support for the Brexit campaign from third parties and the author is surprised that so few journalists draw attention to it. Using third parties to circumvent rules on support for political parties is a well-known phenomenon. But campaign manager Cummings for Brexit managed to make very skillful use of Facebook with 3.6 billion pounds and data analysts from Cambridge Analytica (which were investigated afterwards because they illegally used data from millions of users in the United States). A small group of libertarian Eurosceptics, right-wing British politicians have been inspired by the United States for some time, with the aim of low taxes and little to no regulation. Mostly climate deniers who in the US wanted Trump as president without climate rules and a

⁷ <https://lokale-democratie.nl>

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Brexit for more free trade with England. To that end, they try to 'buy' democracy for this libertarian vision of society. (Geoghegan, 2020)

This perspective of unbridled libertarian free trade deviates from normal conservatism and works thoughtfully and professionally to gain influence on society. Someone from the Koch Foundation (Koch brothers focus their political activities on the support of think tanks and institutions which deny or downplay man-made climate change or its impact⁸) explains (Geoghegan, 2020):

1. Invest in academics who collect the 'raw intellectual material'. So, one uses scientific material, which is filtered from a certain perspective.
2. Then convert those illegible texts into usable form. Think tanks with a libertarian perspective are the key players. They preach doctrines of Hayek and Friedman (Cato Institute⁹). For the less economically educated citizen, it is difficult to refute the statements. (Caldwell, 2010)
3. Subsidize citizen groups that send politicians to take certain positions and provide political movements to lobby the establishment.

The word lobbyist comes from a time when people outside the meeting room in the lobby could present a petition to passing politicians. Those days are over. Professional lobbyists now sit inside at the table and sometimes help write documents for politicians. "We all know how it works," said Cameron, former conservative head of government: "The lunches, the hospitality, whispering in your ear the ex-ministers and advisors who are hired." That plays a global role. If the EU and Great Britain had better protect this type of influence from the libertarian perspective, the Brexit that many Britons now regret would probably not have taken place. The approach of large companies and wealthy think tanks, in this case from the US, to influence the population and politicians is professional and often goes against climate measures. (Geoghegan, 2020)

In a slightly different way, there is also the lobbying circuit in the Netherlands that Cameron mentioned for the climate problems with ex-politicians. This is also known as the 'revolving door'¹⁰ in which personnel move between roles as legislators or regulators in the public sector, and as employees or lobbyists of industries in the private sector.

- Some commotion arose around Cora van Nieuwenhuizen, who resigned as minister to work for the trade association of energy companies in the Netherlands¹¹.
- A merger resulted in Bouwend Nederland where Elco Brinkman¹² (formally leader CDA) who was already chairman of the largest fusion party, became the leader (later became a member of the Senate again). The construction fraud

⁸ particularly wealthy industrialists, known for donations to libertarian and conservative clubs and election campaigns; there are more of them

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cato_Institute

¹⁰ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolving_door_\(politics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolving_door_(politics))

¹¹ <https://nos.nl/artikel/2502916-minister-bemoede-zich-toch-met-energiesector-voor-ze-lobbyist-werd>

¹² https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elco_Brinkman

survey showed that this industry did not take ethics very seriously by fêting officials or sometimes outright bribing them.

- Brinkman was succeeded by Maxime Verhagen, former leader of CDA¹³
- Diederik Samson (former politician of PvdA) became an advisor to the HVC¹⁴ (waste incineration with heat networks) and chairman of one of the national climate tables, namely for the built environment¹⁵. (later went to EU)
- Chairman of all climate tables was Ed Nijpels, former politician VVD¹⁶

All (former) politicians who know their way around The Hague politics. At the climate tables were the interest groups for large-scale companies for electricity and distributors, infrastructure companies (construction) also for the heat networks (central old form energy distribution) strongly represented with people who know how the political decision-makers work. This is not conspiracy thinking, but a poulterer simply looks at chickens differently than a mother in the petting zoo. It is therefore not surprising that with the best of intentions, a lot of attention was paid to, among other things, heat networks with technology in which people were trained and good at¹⁷. Not only new media play a role. The old boys' network mechanism is still an important lobby circuit, and leaders of that network receive a lot of publicity in which they can promote generic technical large-scale solutions with distribution networks, even if that does not suit many situations.

1.2 Propaganda and the idea of self-government (Stanley, 2020) (Stanley, 2015)

In 'How fascism Works the politics of us and them' (Stanley, 2020), Stanley wants to find out what fascist mechanisms there are to come to power. Power that can also deny climate problems. In 'How propaganda Works' (Stanley, 2015) he already indicated the important role of propaganda. Stanley refers to Plato as; "That people are not naturally led to self-government, but rather need a strong leader to follow. Democracy by allowing freedom of speech opens the door to a demagogue plotting the people's need for a strongman; The strongman will use this freedom to take advantage of the people's resentments and fears. Once the strongman seizes power, he will put an end to democracy and replace it with tyranny." In short, democracy is a self-undermining system whose ideals lead to its own demise. Fascists know that. Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels: "This will always be one of the best jokes of democracy, that it gave its mortal enemies the means by which it was destroyed." Once again, we see the enemies of liberal democracy taking advantage of this strategy, pushing free speech to the limit and using it to undermine the opinions of others, as about climate change. Ideologies tending towards fascism are based on a mythical past that has been tragically lost. Depending on how the nation is defined, the mythical past can be religiously or

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maxime_Verhagen

¹⁴ <https://archieff.transport-online.nl/site/81472/samsom-gaat-afvalverwerker-adviseren/>

¹⁵ <https://www.klimaataakkoord.nl/organisatie/sectortafels/gebouwde-omgeving>

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed_Nijpels and <https://www.klimaataakkoord.nl/organisatie/hoe-het-klimaataakkoord-tot-stand-kwam/klimaatberaad>

¹⁷ For paradigm thinking, see the paper 'Quadruple helix and Parsons AGIL scheme'.

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racially pure, etc. But there is a fixed structure in all that mythologizing. For all intents and purposes, a version of the patriarchal family is present, and the mythical past was a good time (America great again; US was 'great' in slave time with cheap labor). If that that type propaganda is successful, the public is left with a destabilized sense of loss, and a source of distrust and anger against those who have been told to be responsible for this loss. But in a global, ever-growing world with more and more consumption, the models of the past no longer work and it is an illusion to go back to those models, even if those times would have been better, which is highly questionable. But a fascist leader can replace truth with power and end up lying without consequences. This is exactly what Kant points out; no longer using your mind without guidance from leaders. This can be a downfall of the Enlightenment and the discourse on sustainability, reason why a well-considered approach to the energy transition is now essential.

But what do traditional parties do about sustainability? Traditional parties say they don't want fascism, but that is of no use to citizens. They want the allowances to be properly arranged, the tax authorities to work properly etc. But they also want a good environment. They are tired of every 4 years the anti-populist rhetoric and another beautiful ideology story without sufficient results. With the internet, they are used to being able to get everything 24/7. So why are these matters not quickly settled by the traditional parties? And if those parties don't deliver, they vote for another party. It is the traditional parties and institutions that are unable to provide good operational governance, but at the same time consider citizens as consumers. Many consumer goods can be delivered quickly by the market. These are excludable rival goods, shown in Table 1. Something is non-excludable if there is no way to exclude people from consumption (such as the army, the police, and seawalls) and rivalrous if a good prevents one consumer's consumption from another consumer's consumption.

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	Excludable	Not excludable
Rival	Private property	Common consumer goods
Not rival	Tolls	Public goods

Table 1; excludable and rival goods

Sustainability is a collective good or interest. In the case of a sea dike, everyone understands the direct consequences of flooding (collective problem) and there is only one solution; collectively build and pay for a dike. You don't buy that with a click on your computer. For CO2 reduction in the context of sustainability, it is important to collectively reduce energy consumption, but in the case of detached houses, for example, the solution is a private matter by purchasing a heat pump, among other things. Then a good public atmosphere, a space in which rational discussions are held, is important for such a collective problem. Partly due to the mass media that work worldwide, there is virtually no public atmosphere with a power-free space for that rational more private discussion. The internet is full of propaganda and even more with advertising that is usually one-sided commercial arguments or bubbles with tunnel vision. It seems important to create a public atmosphere in which people can discuss practical sustainability problems in a power-free rational way. Not only about global

problems, but about exerting influence on yourself and creating local space with your own decision-making powers. Not listening to the voter about general issues, which is what politicians are doing now (marketing strategy), but politics that appeal to the duty of the citizen (Kant), but above all ensures that there is space in which citizens can implement their ideas. It is not the government institution that has a sustainability problem, but the citizens and they must solve it collectively by each taking their part in a tailored way. By getting involved in the process they understand that this collective good is not a consumer good that you can quickly order. Traditional politicians seem unable to involve the citizen and in that process working with ideological means, without the citizen, they are almost dictators of the majority of consumers without a good solution.

1.3 Power and progress in organization of products and communication

'Power and progress our thousand-year struggle over technology and property' (Acemoglu & Johnson, 2023) indicates that new ways of organizing production and communication either serve the interests of the elite *or* can become the foundation for broad prosperity. It is about how the path of new technology will go and who makes which choices for which technology. Are they residents or companies with their interests. Power is about the ability of an individual or group to achieve goals. If two people want the same piece of bread, power determines who gets it. It is also about the vision of how technology should be used. Think of the attention paid to district heat networks and the installation of cables instead of decentralized energy storage and heat pumps. This is about the influence that larger institutions have, where there is no need for coercion or oppression. For example, you have little chance of claiming the piece of bread or giving your opinion if you are flattened by hordes or opinions in the media. In modern societies, persuasion (through media and propaganda) is used to exert influence as mentioned above. An idea that is often repeated (also in the media) is a strong and convincing idea. Ideas are more likely to spread if they are simple, are supported by a nice story and seem to have some credibility (without being a good solution). It also helps if it is propagated by people with a suitable status. Even charisma depends on institutions and conditions. The chairman of a national climate committee is more likely to appear on TV than a citizen with a different but perhaps good idea. Research is often done by interviewing people from the same institutions or companies, who are often involved in large-scale projects and with a staff that provides them with information from their perspective. It depends on the social networks, including rhetorics and propaganda which direction and progress in organization of products and communication solutions are chosen for the energy supply. (Acemoglu & Johnson, 2023) (Christakis & Fowler, 2011)

Take for example for a development path, the power of big banks (Acemoglu & Robinson) where bank managers were in social networks with a lot of economic power and could propagate their ideas. The 'big finance' idea was echoed by economists and legislators who were out to spread theories from this perspective. 'Power and progress' describe the financial crisis and the ease with which banks were supported by governments and were able to quickly return to business as usual after a crisis. What matters then is the agenda setting. Those who ask the question, set the priorities and navigate the options have enormous power to frame the public discussion and to

'convince' others. In doing so, people express their views in global categories, sometimes make wrong generalizations and often work with rules over the thumb. We are short-sighted and tend to find evidence that is in line with what we believe in or in which media want us to believe in.

One of the most important qualities we have from childhood is imitation. Sometimes what we learn is not what is good for us but what others want us to believe. In fact, we learn from listening to the one who is more prominent in society and whom we hear and see the most (starting with our parents). But who is competent? Our willingness to follow status and prestige and imitate successful individuals is so deep in our psyche that it seems almost ingrained. Many people cannot correctly assess one-sided (mis)information from agenda-setters (there is often no time to do so), even if it is clearly indicated that the information is unreliable. The idea is often that it is better to be driven by beliefs than by oppression as in dictatorships. But there are two reasons why persuasion can be equally pernicious. To begin with, those who convince also convince themselves (we are a good actor in history for charity) whereby those who suffer from that conviction are seen as harmful to the charity (you are going to 'cancel' them and your 'followers' will join in). Secondly, partisan possible wrong choices produced by persuasion are less obvious than when they are carried out by force (Acemoglu & Johnson, 2023). Therefore, those mistakes are easier to ignore and potentially more difficult to correct. As is evident from banks, Schumacher's esteem, 'Small in beautiful' has not yet penetrated, is sometimes seen as harmful and 'big business' remains the only good and leading paradigm¹⁸ that is always around. This mainly concerns the agenda-setting that influences society and leads to undesirable development directions, where the way back once the wrong exit has been taken is often difficult if leading people with a group of admirers believe in it themselves.

1.4 Model for democracy and the energy transition

Insights from literature can be summarized in Figure 1. Wealthy players from the economic sector are pushing for a libertarian model (unbridled market forces). Think tanks and the influence of large-scale mainstream increase the power of less democratic parties and negatively influence the public sphere for sustainability. Citizens reduce themselves, partly through politics, to consumers. In the event of stagnation and mistakes, this leads to dissatisfied 'customers' or citizens, where, encouraged by communicatively strong populist speakers, the past is elevated to myth, an outgroup is made a scapegoat (for example environmental activists) and with the call for a strong leader. This creates a self-reinforcing circle in which critical reflection and self-reflection (Enlightenment) within a public sphere decreases further and further. (Acemoglu & Robinson)

¹⁸ See paper for paradigm, and higher order systems in framework history and evolution.

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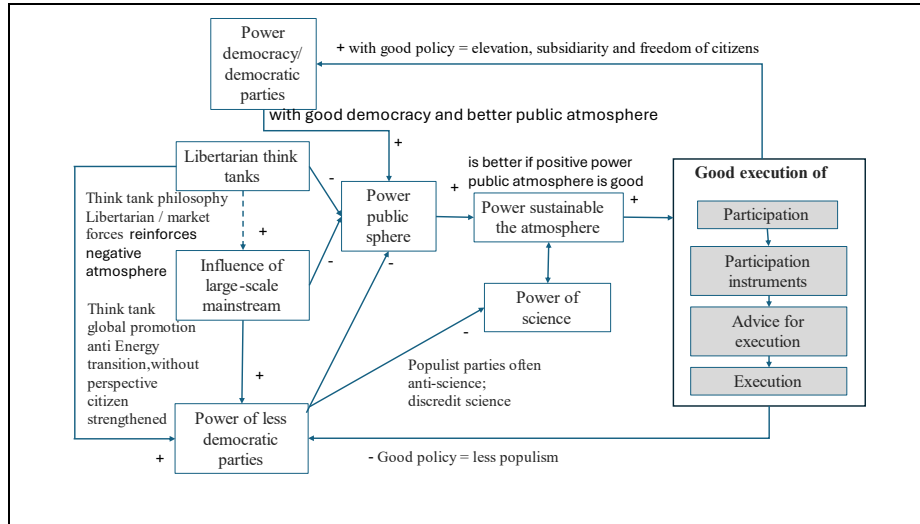


Fig.1. Democracy and energy transition is system terms

If populist parties breakthrough in terms of support and reach a tipping point, established parties indicate that they find the development dangerous without a good alternative. In the context of the energy transition, it is better to counter this populist trend in advance by using science, without climate pushers, to ensure good participation and implementation of the energy transition in a positive atmosphere. This strengthens the position of the democratic parties, who in turn can strengthen the public sphere with more knowledge. Good policy, with for example a citizens assembly on sustainability and energy where citizens can think along and become involved again, lowers the position of less democratic parties. Bad policy has the opposite effect, whereby less democratic parties that are often negative on sustainability become stronger. The latter is harmful to the public sphere and if it goes too far, parties will enter the government that will also frustrate sustainability at another level through legislation and regulations. But everything starts with the public sphere, which can lead to dissatisfaction and voting behavior that rejects sustainability (this scheme can also be applied to other aspects than the energy transition).

2. The eternal struggle between state and society and civil society.

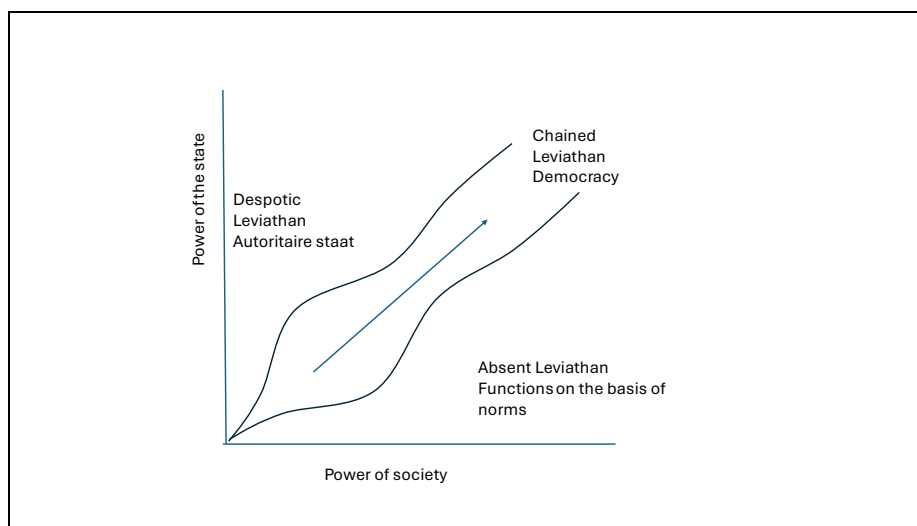
The energy transition requires a lot of creativity and innovative solutions but is as indicated above embedded in a social structure. This paragraph discusses this in 2 subparagraphs.

1. Two Nobel Prize winners (Acemoglu & Johnson , 2023) (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2020) point to the eternal struggle between state and society. The state, often together with large companies (or their interest groups) determines the direction of innovations.
2. These arguments seem to come to similarities with the approach of Habermas where the systems colonialize the lifeworld. The question is what the relation is of civil society and the new media in this discussion. The public sphere and

civil society that can be a mediator in this is discussed in 2.2. (Kunneman, 1985) (Habermas, Theory of communicative action volume II., 1981) (McLuhan, 2002) (McLuhan & Powers, 1989)

2.1 State and society

'The eternal struggle between state and society: a precarious equilibrium' builds a model around Hobbes' Leviathan. From the state of nature with only egoists, there would be a permanent struggle between people, and no one is sure of his life. Hobbes noted that war occurs when people live without a common power that inspires awe everyone. Hobbes called this power the great Leviathan (sea monster) or the state. Better that you must fear one power in a society that functions than that you have to be afraid of everyone. Now the state sometimes wants to abuse its power and then you like to be able to make adjustments as a society. (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2020) (Hobbes, 1985) **Figure 2** presents the authors' ideas about the development of different types of states.



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Fig. 2. Struggle State and society and a balance

To stick to the main points, everything has been simplified into two variables.

1. The first power is that of society, which manifests itself in its norms, practices and institutions, and especially in its collective actions. This variable, on the horizontal axis, is a combination of the general mobilization of society, its institutional power and its ability to curb hierarchy formation through norms.
2. The second is the power of the state. This variable, on the vertical axis, is also a combination of different aspects, such as the power of the political and economic elites and the capacity and power of the state institutions.

This is a highly simplified view because conflicts within society and conflicts within the elite and between the elite and the state institutions require further analysis. What is important is that the Leviathan, the complex of governments and economy, is kept in check (tamed Leviathan) by society, but conversely society also needs rules to function.

It is about balance in modern societies. In some societies this happened mainly through norms, but these can also be very restrictive, such as those of the church in Kant's time. But democracy is also not by definition the solution, as indicated above by Plato, among others. An Enlightened absolutism or despotism can sometimes work better than a democracy. Frederick the Great was a monarch, religiously tolerant, poet and writer and strongly interested in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. In this sense he resembled his contemporary Tsarina Catherine the Great of Russia, who as an enlightened monarch also promoted art. Within the current Western democracy, the power of the government and the market has increased enormously, whereby the state treats citizens as consumers (Barber, 2007). The power of the state is then dominated by the market philosophy that is seen as more efficient. This one-sided approach, with a specific way of outsourcing for government services, will lead to more consumption in a society that will produce increasingly powerful companies that are too big to fail (banks, but also district heating networks of large companies, etc.). If small cooperatives, with better solutions but still insufficient scale, fail their customers are taken over by the large parties. The large parties are then supported by the government when the problems become big, and they can continue with their production systems based on large central systems. They are then supported by the government 'because you cannot leave many voters out in the cold, because then they will vote for another party'. The big question is therefore how to find the right balance in a globalizing society.

The authors of 'The eternal struggle between state and society' (Acemoglu & Johnson, 2023) illustrate this with the red queen effect that Lewis Carroll describes in *Through the Looking Glass*. In this book, Alice meets the Red Queen and runs away with her.

"When Alice thought back to it later, she couldn't understand how they came to it." She noticed that, although they both seemed to run hard, 'the trees and the other things in the area never seemed to change place: no matter how fast they went, they never seemed to pass anything'. When at last they stopped, Alice looked about in wonder. 'No, but, I believe we stayed under this tree the whole time! Everything is still exactly as it was before!' "Of course," said the Queen. What would you have thought?" Well, in our country,' said Alice you usually ended up somewhere else if you ran very fast for a long time, as we did.' 'What a slow country it is!' said the Queen. 'Because here you have to run as fast as you can to stay in the same place.'

The red queen effect relates to a situation where you must keep running just to stay in your place, like state and society run to maintain the balance between them. In Carroll's book, all that running was worth it. If society slackens and does not run fast enough (in terms of Kant Enlightenment) to keep up with the growing Leviathan of the state, the chained Leviathan can quickly turn into a despotic one. The competition of society is necessary to keep the Leviathan in check, and the more powerful and influential the Leviathan is, the more powerful and vigilant society must become. But it is also necessary for the Leviathan to continue to run in a globalizing world, to expand its capacity and face new challenges. Unfortunately, society not only seems to stand still but even to decline by making itself enthusiastic as a consumer, dependent on state and economy, with consequences for broad prosperity, climate and thus the well-being of humanity. This has also been noted by many other authors (Achterhuis, 2010) (Barber, 2007) (Galbraith, 1961) (Galbraith, Geld, 1976) (Hofman, Naar de verlichting en de

eeuwige vrede van Kant, 2018) (Heertje, 2014) (Nussbaum, 2011) (Mintzberg, 1996) (Rotmans, 2010) including Habermas who suggests that these systems colonize the lifeworld. (Kunneman, 1985) (Habermas, 1981) (Habermas, 2011) (Heysse, Rummens, & Tinneveld, 2007)

2.2 The concept of civil society

'Democracy and Associations' (Warren, 2001) extends the line of the Enlightenment philosopher Kant, who gave the categorical imperative for how to live in a society, to the sociologist Parsons and eventually the philosopher/sociologist Habermas. Kant's imperative is: 'Act according to that maxim which one at the same time wants to become a universal law'. There must be no contradiction if your actions were to become universal. You cannot lie, because if that becomes universal, coexistence is not possible. The problem is that what one person still considers universally permissible, the other rejects. Habermas therefore proposes a power-free discourse in which truth, correctness and truthfulness are pursued (Habermas, 1981). Now, such a discourse is not intended to be used when buying a bag of potatoes or writing a speeding ticket. For that we have the media, money (market) and power (government). What remains in Habermas is the lifeworld and his thesis is that this lifeworld is colonized by the system. In other words: Leviathan is no longer tamed. Habermas' classification partly relies on that of Parsons and Warren elaborates that into associations, which is a wide range of clubs, trade associations, associations, NGOs etc. The aim is to improve democracy or tame Leviathan and decolonize life world. This requires an active attitude of citizens in society. That is using your own mind towards society and your collective interest, the environment at the intermediate and distance level (Fig. 3).

To arrive at such an attitude Kant already stated: 'Man is the only being that needs education' *Über Pädagogik* (1803). Imitating or copying as a means of education or learning seems to be ingrained in people, as indicated earlier. In companies this insight of implicit knowledge in which proximity between people is important (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) is recognized and in education working in practice in which students work together is also often applied in school and university (Hofman, 1998) (Hofman & Leeuwen, 1998) (Hofman, Foks, & Kokhuis, 2000). It is therefore strange to assume that citizens can learn how democracy really works without gaining experience together. It is naive to think this can be learned from a book. That is why it is important to solve these activities as close as possible to and with people who do this together in a democratic way at intimate and intermediate levels (fig 3). Habermas talks about coffee houses and the public sphere and others talk about civil society. In any case it is important that people themselves solve local problems locally through discourse to deal with democracy in the right way (for example in citizens assembly. The energy transition offers many opportunities for this if central authorities and legislation provide the necessary decision-making space.

Locating civil society					
Closeness of social relations	Means of social control				
	Legal coercion	Social (norms & communication)			Money
Distant	State	Mediating Associations "Political society"	Mediating Spaces; Publics	Mediating Associations "economic society"	Markets
Intermediate		Civil society Pure associative relations			
Intimate		Families, Friendships			

This paper concerns strengthening local civil society by elevating citizens through cooperative work to create a better atmosphere for both civil action and energy transition with more influence in 'mediating spaces; public'

Fig. 3. Location civil society

In principle this fits the ideology of traditional parties (see appendix 1), but in practice they do not act according to that ideology and the Enlightenment.

- Social democrats saw progress in consumption but the elevation in terms of the Enlightenment for social development and democracy has not materialized¹⁹. They remain stuck in delivering what the voter wants, so they treat the citizen as a consumer without including them in democratic forms of decision-making in practice. Citizens react with less commitment for general issues (Hurenkamp, 2017)
- The Christian democrats have also made little progress with mergers of municipalities and their principle of subsidiarity²⁰. Subsidiarity means placing responsibilities at the lowest possible level, as close as possible to the people concerned. It went to increasing scale of government and companies further away from the citizen.
- The liberals can hardly be proud of the market forces that should consist of many buyers and suppliers instead of large companies that dump their goods and services on addicted consumers via the media as a kind of article of faith.

In summary, traditional political parties have not lived up to their principles, which is why there is no society that now goes from intimate to intermediate (**fig 3**) in freedom and gains experience in democratic decision-making. Collective goods such as the

¹⁹ 'concentrate efforts at elevation around the education of children and the duty of citizenship for adults'. S& D- 7/8 | 2011Rutger Claassen

²⁰. When carrying out government tasks, the CDA assumes the principle of subsidiarity: higher levels of government refrain from tasks that can be adequately handled at a lower level. www.cda.nl/bestuurdersvereniging/politiek-bestuur/visie-op-openbaar-bestuur

environment cannot be realized with a mouse click, as people are now used to and educated. This makes it difficult to realize these type of collective products without public support and disconnected people vote for radical parties if something doesn't go their way.

3. From vision to implementation

After outlining above the challenges for democracy in the context of the energy transition and a further explanation of civil society, this paragraph discusses possible solutions. The subparagraphs are:

1. The general model provides a diagram to get from a vision to an implementation, considering the democracy with social society, the local situation, and the level of participation.
2. The participation ladder, often used to indicate the role that participation plays in a project, is given.
3. Framing citizens and self-fulfilling prophecy, which briefly discusses the images that policy makers may have and their resulting categorization of participants.
4. Advisory relationships that are used based on the classification in the participation ladder and the way of how with framing policy makers construct an image of citizens.
5. Diffusion of innovations where Roger's model is often applied but then in a narrow sense for technological solutions while it works just as well for improving democracy, civil society together with a better implementation of the energy transition. However, an extension to a more dynamic system seems useful

Various practical methods used for that participation are examined in Kim Looyens and Dr. Steven Van de Walle who state that 'Participation often fails because people choose certain (widely used) methods too impulsively without having thought in advance about what exactly they want to achieve'. This is certainly true if, as proposed here, the democratic effects are considered. These methods are no part of this paper.

3.1 The general model to implementation

The previous paragraphs are based on literature by Kant, Parsons, Habermas and others, but especially by the Nobel Prize winners for Economics 2024, the economists Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson. who looked at the differences in prosperity and how institutions are formed and influence prosperity. Although the energy transition is not the only domain, it is an excellent opportunity to address the issues raised by the Nobel Prize winners, with the collective good of the environment on the one hand and the solution that can be sought with individual residents on the other.

The core elements include the vision of democracy, including civil society, institutions, and the local situation that together should lead to decision-making around the level of participation. Figure 5 shows from this social perspective how the implementation of the energy transition can be approached in such a way that it contributes to social support for the sustainability and functioning of democracy in a broader context.

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- 1) The first question that politicians must answer is: do we want to strengthen democracy and participation of residents and if so, what goals are important according to Warren's scheme. Unfortunately, now, the energy transition only focuses on technical objectives.
- 2) A good solution is impossible without taking the local situation into account. Several perspectives play a role in this:
 - a) The administrative perspective, such as the quality of the decision that must be monitored and keeping the process manageable.

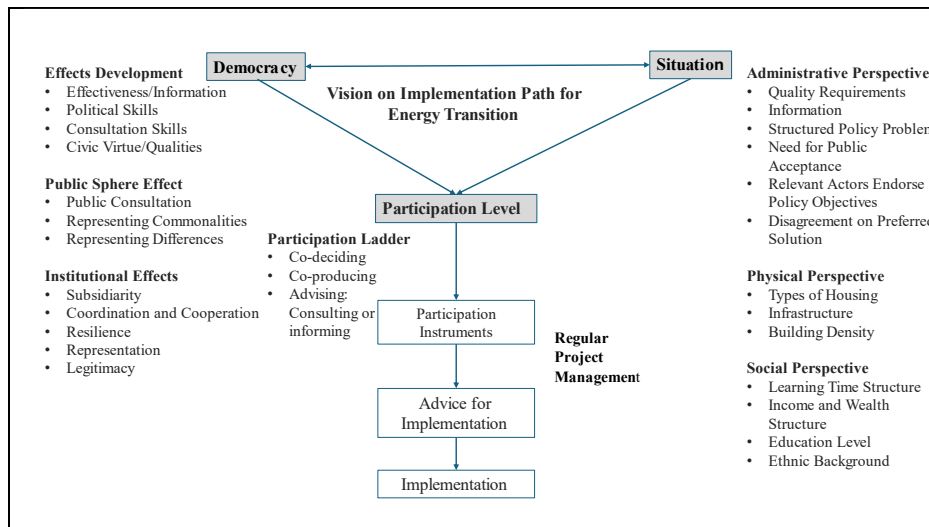


Fig. 5 Diagram structured approach to democracy and energy transition.

- b) Physical conditions. The possibilities for a village with many low-rise buildings and low building density where a large-scale district heat network is a difficult alternative requires a different approach than an apartment district where individual solutions are practically impossible. Infrastructure also plays a role such as heat and electricity transport systems compared to options such as neighborhood or home batteries.
- c) What is the social composition of the neighborhood or district. A village where residents have a relatively high income, and financial position can contribute more than deprived neighborhood. A neighborhood with a higher level of education will require less guidance for a neighborhood council than if it concerns low-skilled people. In one neighborhood there is more cohesion than in another.

It also happens that national programs not considering the local conditions are implemented by municipality officials. In this case, the connection or network between local municipality officials and national officials, who promote their knowledge from their perspective with more resources is stronger than the connection between municipality officials and the residents. This means that

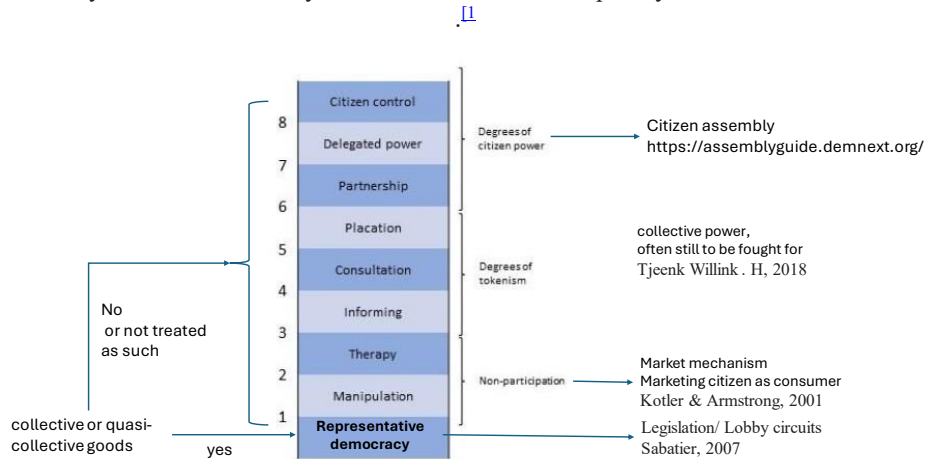
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municipality officials at the local level do not search solutions with residents to achieve a better society, but simply implement general (subsidy) rules for technical solutions. Municipality officials and politics should go as a primary task for a citizens' assembly (burgerberaad) for a democratic perspective and engagement for the future with the national arrangement as a supplement.

- 3) Based on the outcome, a certain level of participation is determined in terms of, among other things, the participation ladder, after which a normal project approach follows which is not part of this paper.

3.2 Participation ladder

A participation ladder ranks the extent to which citizen participation is possible. There are many variants, but Sherry Arnstein's is the most frequently mentioned.



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Fig. 6 View of Sherry Arnstein's 'Ladder of Citizen Participation'. Source: based on (Arnstein, 1969) extended for this paper.

There are three main groups:

- Citizen assembly as an example in which citizens enter a partner relationship with the government. The government needs to facilitate this with a correct framework (important) and then accept the outcome if the assembly stays with this framework. Essential is that citizens from a district or neighborhood are randomly selected to study issues such as sustainability or the energy transition. The group has to represent the area and not only groups with special interests.
- Symbolism or fake participation, such as many public participation meetings that are often more intended to legitimize the plans already made by the government. Citizens still must fight to be taken seriously (Tjeenk Willink. H, 2018)

- No participation, which often involves manipulation or forms of 'education' of citizens. Marketing tools are suitable here. The similarity with manipulation is targeting, psychological techniques and communication. Both try to influence people's decisions and behavior, often without the person being fully aware of the influence exerted on them. Marketing can be more ethical and transparent.

In the last two forms, citizens remain in the category of consumers, where municipal officials use forms of communication that correspond to the marketing of products and services (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001) without engagement with residents.

As indicated in figure 5, it is important to assess the situation well before opting for the level of participation. A major pitfall is that people quickly and with too little thought out switch to the instruments for participation such as brainstorming, participation meetings when the plans are almost finished, etc. A good assessment is certainly important if the element of democracy and civic society is to be considered. That almost never happens.

3.3 Framing citizens and self-fulfilling prophecy

Citizens have the most interest in the long term for their children and grandchildren (whom they say they love very much) in sustainability with less air pollution, forest fires, floods, etc. and should therefore have the most influence in a democratic state and civil society to achieve this. A government should then have the goal of ensuring that they achieve this collective goal with citizens, whereby individuals are asked to become engaged and do something to achieve it (duty Kant). Companies and institutions are means to ensure that society can adapt to a changing environment in the right way. Citizens should indicate the right and true way (from Habermas's lifeworld).

By classifying companies as important stakeholders, the government has a less diverse group (than with citizens) who are financially stronger to take steps. There are economic interests at stake for companies, for example in grid congestion. Quickly providing cables for companies seems to yield quick results in the short term, which is also nice for politicians who want to be re-elected after 4 years. But is that always better? The project scale is larger and seems more efficient. But with a variant of the economy of scale, economic numbers are at stake here, where many small units for energy generation and storage are much more economical in some situations. These small units are more flexible to use, much easier to produce in series or mass production and are easier to fit into existing infrastructure at lower costs and to install where they are needed within a configuration of the electricity grid. Demand conditions are a crucial part of Michael Porter's Diamond Model (Porter M. , 1990) (Porter M. , 1999), which explains competitive advantage. For example, the demand in the home market is vital. When local customers are sophisticated and demanding, they push companies to innovate and improve their products and services. This high standard helps firms to be competitive. However, if the customer is not sufficiently involved and the government places certain technologies (for example district heating) and (large) companies in a privileged position, there is no longer a trend of a critical demand pull, but of a supply push. From an economic perspective it is better for the government to get citizens well involved who can then, by asking the right questions, force companies to deliver the right innovative products to adapt to the new sustainable environment.

The philosopher Kant already indicated that people think in categories, which must be dealt with more consciously when dividing people into target groups. This seems to be confirmed by more recent psychology:

- People tend to perceive members of an outgroup as highly similar to each other (stereotype) whereas they tend to see all kinds of individual differences among members of their own group. This encourages us to simplified social representation of these outgroups.
- Our expectations of people's personalities or capabilities may influence the way we actually treated them which in turn may influence their behaviour in such a way that confirms our expectation (self fulfilling prophecy).

In other words, if a government classifies citizens as not interested and accordingly not approach them in the right way, they will also become less interested. If the (local) government continuously attaches more importance to the opinions of companies and consultancy firms, it gives a relatively negative opinion about the input of residents.

So, when a government holds a negative view of its citizens, seeing them primarily through an economic lens as consumers without real engagement, this can create a self-fulfilling prophecy with several adverse effects:

- **Erosion of Trust:** If citizens sense that the government views them negatively, they may become distrustful and disengaged. This lack of trust can lead to reduced participation in government-led initiatives, including those related to the energy transition.
- **Reduced Cooperation:** When citizens feel undervalued or misunderstood, they are less likely to cooperate with government policies. This can hinder the implementation of energy transition measures, as public support and cooperation are crucial for success ²¹.
- **Negative Feedback Loop:** The government's negative perception can lead to policies that do not fully consider citizens' needs and concerns (promote proposals that do not fit). This can result in ineffective or unpopular policies, reinforcing the government's negative view and further alienating citizens.
- **Stifled Innovation:** A lack of positive engagement and support from the government can stifle innovation and initiative among citizens (as above mentioned in context of Porter). This is particularly detrimental in the context of the energy transition, where new ideas and active participation are essential.

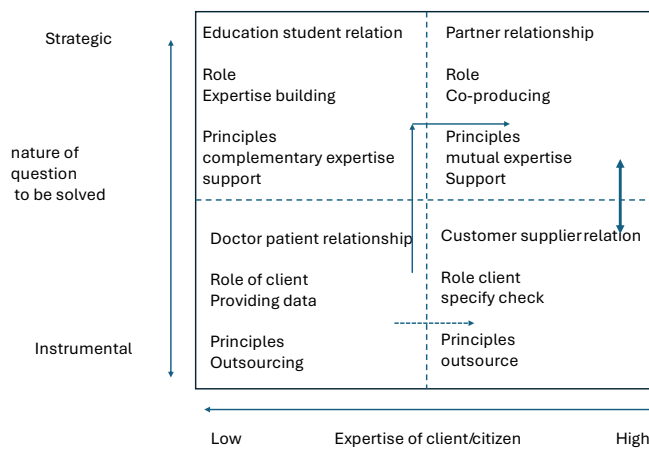
However, breaking the circle can become difficult if alienation has been going on for a while and a group formation has taken place. When a social identity is becomes salient, people's individual interests are pushed to the background (Steg & Groot de, 2019). Depersonalization of people's attitudes toward the environment can occur if

²¹ <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/attitudes-and-performance-the-impact-of-self-fulfilling-prophecies>

they are guided by the content of that identity as expressed in group norms. This can undermine the attitudes and behaviors that are personally positive for the environment.

3.4 Advisory relationships, the participation ladder and diffusion of innovations

In order to gain insight into the advisory relationships in the context of democratization, models can be used for advice. One of these models is based on two axes, the instrumental and the strategic, the latter of which can include insight into energy problems in general and society. This results in 4 roles for an advisor.



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Fig 7. Relationship type of problem to be solved and the expertise inhabitants

1. In the doctor-patient relationship, the citizen is seen as a patient. This is in fact a consumer approach. When the prescribed cough syrup is finished, you just continue smoking. This is in fact what the fix brigade²² and basically energy coach²³ do in the Netherlands. If energy prices rise or there is a draft in the room, they come along with some measures and if prices fall or the worst is gone, the customer goes back to the order of the day. The residents' group is not engaged.
2. For participation and democracy, it is important to get citizens into the strategic mode where they build up expertise on climate problems and preferably also democracy. The approach to the problem is then different. The problem is not only applying draught tape, but the social environmental objective. There should be no discussions about the rainforests, but about what the possibilities are to contribute locally to sustainability. It must be about solutions that can be influenced by local neighborhoods, whereby local governments must give much more room to influence matters and encourage

²² <https://fixbrigade.nl/>

²³ <https://www.kieszeiker.nl/energie/energiecoach>

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them to use that space for innovative solutions. This can be done by coaches, but they are usually too much in instrumental mode themselves. There has to be more expertise building for citizens to act strategic.

3. From the position of expertise building, the step can be made to co-producing. The knowledge and insight are then at the same level and it is then possible to exchange mutual expertise.
4. Finally, it is possible to use citizens from that strategic position to carry out outsourcing that is appropriate to their own situation in an equal way.

Municipalities often make various offers in the instrumental sphere in which they outsource at too global a level. Simply put; They offer cough syrup (buy them at the pharmacy), but not the insight why it is better to stop smoking from a social point of view. The latter seems to be precisely the basic task for the government, where the instrumental part can be a means to take the next step.

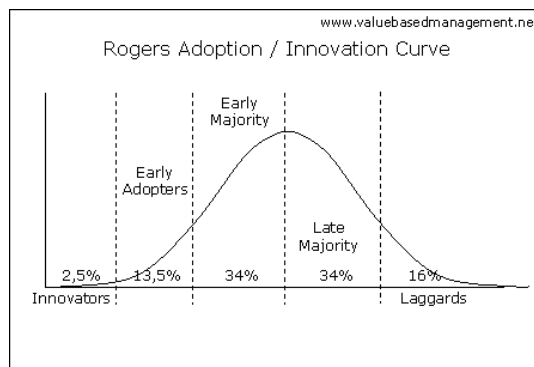
3.5 Diffusion of innovation

Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory explains how new ideas and technologies spread through societies. According to Rogers, the process involves five key elements: the innovation itself, communication channels, time, the social system, and the adopters. The model of the innovation decision process consists of 5 stages, but that does not have to be about products only but can also be about improving the society and democracy. This is indicated next to each other in the table.

Stage	Innovation products	Civil society and democracy
Knowledge	Individuals first learn about the innovation and gain some understanding of how it functions	People first become aware of civil society ideas through various channels such as media, education, or interactions in neighborhood.
Persuasion:	Individuals form a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the innovation.	Individuals and groups form opinions about of civil society, influenced by the perceived benefits and success other areas.
Decision:	Individuals engage in activities that lead to a choice to adopt or reject the innovation.	Societies or influential groups decide whether to adopt democratic principles, often through political movements in the mediating Spaces ; Publics (see Warren)
Implementation	Individuals put the innovation into use	Democratic practices and institutions, more discourse and citizens' assembly
Confirmation:	Individuals seek reinforcement decision and may reverse the decision if exposed to conflicting messages.	Societies seek to reinforce their commitment to democracy, often through continued reforms and education to sustain democratic values.

Where in marketing (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001) only a product within an existing lifestyle or target group is considered, it is desirable for a civil society that it is about the process concerning a certain item that people have to agree on together. That item can be sustainability or the energy transition. So you use the environmental problem to start a process of engagement and a better civil society with the result that people also consider things like heat pumps, solar panels or other solutions. Then there are simultaneous the adopter categories:

1. Innovators: The first individuals to adopt an innovation. They are willing to take risks and are often seen as adventurous.
2. Early Adopters: These individuals adopt new ideas early but carefully. They are often opinion leaders within their communities.
3. Early Majority: This group adopts innovations just before the average person. They are deliberate and thoughtful in their adoption process.
4. Late Majority: These individuals adopt innovations after the average person. They are skeptical and cautious about new ideas.
5. Laggards: The last to adopt an innovation. They are resistant to change and rely on traditional methods.



Finally, there are now additions to Rogers from the dynamic systems theory, which pay attention to social tipping points. The moralized nature of sustainable behaviors could lead to unique tipping trajectories. Although moralization may initially generate social friction that delays tipping points, it can accelerate change at later stages by increasing social pressure on laggards. By implementing early system-level changes, policymakers can help reduce the initial inertia created by moralization and accelerate social tipping points. This development is interesting because it can inform the decisions of activists, policymakers, professionals, and researchers.²⁴

4. Conclusion

The energy transition takes place in an environment with many forces that determine the public sphere. These forces include libertarian think tanks with less climate-friendly

²⁴ <https://www.cell.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2590-3322%2824%2900147-7> M Judge, T.Bouman, L Steg, J Bolderdijk

visions and a lot of financial resources to spread their ideas through new media. The power of large parties is also increasing through traditional lobbying. There are various strategies when it comes to propaganda. These same forces also largely determine how new technologies are deployed and in which directions research and innovations are carried out. This paper attempts to identify the atmosphere-determining points of attention that require attention per situation, whereby it is noted that the energy transition can contribute to improving the atmosphere through a good approach. The latter, a better atmosphere can weaken negative actions from the politicians. Poorly executed energy transition has a negative impact on the public sphere and increases the chance of growth of political parties that block further sustainability by the national government.

There is a continuous form of competition between the state (with companies; system) and society (lifeworld). (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2020) (Habermas, 1981). As society becomes more complex, the state needs more resources for regulation. On the other hand, society will have to grow with models in which they can effectively organize countervailing power. Ideally, there is always an equilibrium at an ever-higher level of complexity. According to the model of the red queen, both must keep running fast to always remain in equilibrium together. Now the state with companies seems to run faster than society. More attention seems to be needed for civil society. This is in line with the Enlightenment where the social democrats realized material progress but less elevation, the Christian democrats made little progress with mergers of municipalities with subsidiarity and the liberals with market forces are not really on the right track regarding the freedom of people. Reflection on the progress of the Enlightenment, with thinking for yourself and an evaluation of the lifeworld and civil society is what it is all about. Since it is a collective interest and the energy transition in the context of sustainability is a collective interest and requires the commitment of individuals, this is an excellent opportunity to work together with citizens on a better democracy and sustainability. Further research and practical experience are needed in this approach.

It is then important to achieve good participation from the perspective of democracy and the situation as it occurs in practice. A schedule is given for the implementation. Framing the residents is important here. If researchers and governments see residents as less competent and uninterested, this leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is true that not all residents have the same interest and think along at the same level, but it is in any case important that attention is not only paid to technical instrumental short-term solutions (cough syrup after which one can start smoking again), but that a learning process is also started for what is called strategic long-term thinking here. This requires a different or additional style of advising than just advising on technical solutions.

If residents start working more from a perspective of sustainability, they will also develop more competencies. A participation ladder can be used to convert this into a program, but in such a way that participation for a higher level is also included. Participation is a learning process for everyone to an ever-higher level in which the same innovation theory of Rogers can be used for the dissemination of innovations. The difference is that not only technical innovation, but also social integration and attention for democracy and civil society are integrally included. For this purpose, work is also

done with additions for more dynamic models (Treur, 2020) (Hofman & Treur, 2021) that follow on from this paper; a combination that is further investigated.

Sustainability is a problem for the entire community and not only for the municipal government and the government. This is the start of a new approach, in which the silent majority is not deterred by climate pushers and alienated, but gains more insight into the problems in democratic decision-making, which requires further research, also in the field of implementation methods.

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