



Living Democracy: Five Characteristics

Fortunately, a richer, more effective understanding and practice of democracy are nascent worldwide: Democracy is coming to be understood not as *set system* but as a *dynamic set of system characteristics* already proving effective in a range of human settings, from local communities to global politics.

Dynamic: Living Democracy is not a new “ism,” blueprint, or utopian end-state vision. It is an evolving ethos enabling us not simply to right a particular injustice but to create more inclusive ways of making decisions. Continually incorporating new experience, Living Democracy is a synergistic, generative work in progress. In this sense and more, Living Democracy might best be understood as the *social analogue of ecology itself*.

Values-driven: Life-enhancing values guide this dynamic unfolding. Among them are inclusion, mutual accountability and fairness, which have emerged in widely disparate cultures. Striving to manifest these values, Living Democracy is a culture of attitudes, expectations and norms that increasingly enhance life in community—including the well-being of nonhuman cohabitants of our small planet.

Comprehensive: Democracy’s core values are effective in economic and cultural life as well as political life. The market, for example, ceases to be an absolute that *supersedes* our values; it becomes a tool for *realizing* our values by creating healthy societies. Businesses still respond to market cues, but with formal accountability for the consequences of their actions. Citizens assume responsibility for deciding what is and is not allocated by the market as well as for the impact of their marketplace choices on the health of their communities and the planet.

Skills-based: Democracy is a learned art. Humans are innately social beings but born lacking specific skills of *effective* participation. So Living Democracy is deliberately taught—and practiced—just like playing the piano or reading. Schools, businesses, and community institutions attend to the teaching of such democratic arts as active listening, creative conflict through negotiation and mediation, and mentoring and reflecting on experience.

Power-creating: More than dispersing power, Living Democracy *creates power*. Taken to its Latin root, *posse*, power means “to be able.” Living Democracy creates power by enabling more people to act on their values and interests. It widens the circle of problem solvers. Engaging those most directly affected, Living Democracy expands creative, problem-solving power because it taps the experience and insight of people closest to the problem, the creativity engendered when diverse perspectives meet, and the commitment to action that people willingly make when they “own” and are a valued part of the plan. In contrast to failing Thin Democracies today, Living Democracy keeps the goal of equal voice foremost as citizens strive to remove the power of concentrated wealth from governance and to infuse the power of citizens’ voices into governance and economic life.

Four Global Changes Making Possible Living Democracy’s Emergence

- A revolution in human dignity as more and more cultures awaken to innate human rights.
- Ecological consciousness revealing the interconnectedness of all life.
- Awareness of global ecocide to which Thin Democracy contributes and cannot reverse.
- A communications revolution empowering citizen movements, democratizing knowledge, and enhancing transparency in decision making.