



DOING DEMOCRACY

HOW SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS
BRIDGE DIVIDES, FIGHT APATHY AND
STRENGTHEN CIVIL LIBERTIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are fewer healthy democracies today than there were a decade ago.¹ Populism, extremist movements, low engagement of citizens in representative democracy, and shrinking civic and media liberties are emerging around the world.² Engagement with democratic systems and how to improve them must be rethought.

Social entrepreneurs are well suited to this challenge since they address problems in innovative ways that question current social dynamics, visualise the way forward, and directly pursue the future. Our analysis of 25 leading social entrepreneurs across Europe revealed seven strategies through which democratic systems can reach new levels of development. As citizens, professionals, and thinkers we can all make use of these strategies and join the efforts to:

1. Make politics engaging and relatable;
2. Foster offline engagement through online tools;
3. Bring unlikely allies together;
4. Leverage the power of networks;
5. Shift power relations;
6. Tap into citizens' skills and expertise;
7. Use research as a basis for reflection and action.

At the core of the work of Ashoka Fellows is the insight that democracy is a skill that must be strengthened and used daily. Individuals, funders, civil society organisations, public agencies, and businesses must ensure that we organise our daily work around democratic principles, and that we empower everyone around us as citizens.

- Civil society organisations must focus on reshaping social power relations, bring wide varieties of groups and stakeholders together, and codevelop solutions with communities.
- The public sector must approach global issues from a local perspective to make them relatable; it must put all communities at the centre of all levels of policymaking.
- Funders must promote transparency by making their data publicly available and collaborating with civic projects directly addressing democratic challenges.
- Individuals must participate in active democratic engagement by seeking out issues they care about, attending debates, events, and sharing skills.

We can all “do democracy” where we are, with the people around us. Let’s get to work!