

A Wise Democracy Pattern Language

Design guidance for catalyzing groups, activities, systems
and societies capable of co-generating collective wisdom
v2.0

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Welcome to the Journey!


Key to the Cards



All Concerns Addressed

Objections and disagreements usually arise from failure to take into account someone's needs, values, interests, or sense of what's needed here. So translate their objections into concerns to bypass their adversarial energy. That helps all parties collaboratively address concerns so everyone feels heard and satisfied, generating wiser solutions and more buy-in.

Some related patterns
29 Expanding Situational Curiosity
62 Possibility Thinking 63 Power of Listening 70 Range of Tolerance 76 Safety First Then Challenge 90 Well-Utilized Life Energy 96 Working Through Feelings



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Pattern Image — The pattern name and image together offer quick intuitive insight into what the pattern is about.

Image Credits — Images are individually copyrighted. For links to the owner(s) go to the individual pattern's page on wd-pl.com

Pattern Name — If you run into unusual words or special meanings in a pattern's name, refer to the Glossary in this booklet or on wd-pl.com/glossary/

Pattern Heart — A 50–60-word description to communicate the pattern's essence. See its web-page for more details.

Some Related Patterns — If you want to focus on this pattern, here are seven related patterns to help you explore what else to pay attention to.

Category Symbol — This pattern joins with others to help answer a shared "category question" (revealed in the accompanying insert).

Pattern Number — Indicates this pattern's place in the alphabetic list of all the patterns (available in the accompanying insert).

Part One: Ways To Engage

A Quick Overview

There are many approaches to learning and using our wise democracy pattern language (WDPL).

For a general understanding of how this valuable tool can be used, you can start by looking down the list of patterns and stopping at any pattern that attracts your attention. Read its pattern card for the 'heart' of what it's about, for the category it fits into and for other patterns that are related to it. You can explore the pattern deeper by going to its own web page on the wd-pl.com site. There you'll find essays and videos about the pattern and references and links to practical methods and experiences others have had around that pattern.

On the other hand, you may have a specific purpose or project in mind. For example:

- A public engagement consultant in London used his understandings of the "Generative Interactions" and "Multi-Media Engagement" patterns to weave together (a) a 3-week simple online participatory idea-exploration forum which engaged 1100 people with (b) three intense 2 ½- hour face-to-face forums involving between 45 and 85 participants each.
- A state government in Austria uses understandings embodied in the "Microcosms and Populations" and "Citizen-Stakeholder Integration" patterns to hold randomly selected, expert-advised Civic Councils whose findings and recommendations are discussed in community gatherings and then passed on to multi-stakeholder Responder Groups for implementation.
- A co-op house in Oregon uses understandings from the "All Concerns Addressed" and "Range of Tolerance" patterns to make effective timely collective decisions.

If you have a specific goal, you might start by picking a few patterns to explore deeply, using their cards and the website wd-pl.com. This will deepen your understanding of the interrelated world of wise democracy and provide you with practical references, methods and resources. Consider joining the global community of WDPL practitioners who share experiences and ideas about using the patterns to serve the world through their work. As you work with these cards, you'll inevitably develop greater understanding of the whole field. You'll start thinking with the patterns, seeing where they're vibrant or missing and applying them with increasing fluidity and sophistication.

Activities and Suggested Uses

Why and how to use these wise democracy pattern cards

You can use these wise democracy pattern language cards

- to understand wise democracy and its patterns more deeply,
- to reflect on real or hypothetical situations or democratic approaches, and
- to envision how an activity, community or political system could be more wisely democratic.

Below are four ways the cards can serve individuals or groups who seek to further wise democracy. (Although these cards can be used in many ways to inform individual and group life, they deliver their greatest gifts to people longing for the emergence of wise democracy. That's what they are designed to do.)

- 1. Language** — You may be one of the many people who finds that this wise democracy pattern language gives you names for things you've been sensing for a long time — and so it can be used as an actual language to talk about those things. You can pick patterns intentionally or at random to think about, learn from and get familiar with — and then talk about them with others who speak this language.
- 2. Organizing and Sense-Making** — Our wise democracy pattern language provides a whole-system perspective within which you can make common sense of diverse initiatives, ideas, and practices which could play a part in the development of wise democracy. Although you and others may be working within realms described by certain patterns, you may not see how your work relates to the others or to the whole wise democracy vision. By highlighting these relationships — within each pattern and among "related" patterns — the highly interlinked pattern language framework can facilitate such activities as organizing, coalition-building, education/curriculum design, and self-guided learning.
- 3. Hope and Vision** — This wise democracy pattern language explicitly addresses institutional, cultural, and systemic dysfunctions in politics, governance, and economics. You can use it to translate the life-degrading, stupid, and insane phenomena you see around you into a sense of possibility and guidance for action.

4. Discernment, Planning and Review —

This wise democracy pattern language is especially useful for examining specific initiatives, activities, methods, institutions, systems, and other such phenomena to clarify how they manifest, help or hinder the wise democracy vision and what potential gifts each one offers. You can use it when planning and designing new initiatives or reflecting on something you've already done.

Feel free to vary these exercises according to your needs. If you want more variety or specific instructions, explore the activities on wd-pl.com/activities/.

And if you stumble on a great new exercise of your own creation, please describe it in the comment section at the bottom of that page so that others can try it out.

Enjoy!

How to get started: Dealing the Deck

The guidance below can help you get started with some group pattern card exercises that serve your group's purpose and situation. (Note that you can adapt them for personal use as well.)

Begin by dealing out all the cards in a deck to members of your group, who then examine the cards they're holding to see which ones speak to whatever question the group is exploring. For example, you could ask people, "What card in your hand best represents something we handled well in the participatory initiative we just completed?" Or, "What patterns are most relevant for what we are about to do, and what does that tell us about who we should work with?" Participants then volunteer to read the card(s) they chose and share why they chose them. If there's time, the group can then discuss what insights those patterns have to offer in response to the question(s) they are exploring. They can always go into more depth by consulting each pattern's "related patterns" or delving into the extensive descriptions and "Examples and Resources" provided on each pattern's webpage.

You can adapt the above process to analyze a political or economic system, to envision a community engagement culture, to plan a stakeholder gathering, or for any other system or activity which could be altered to generate more empowered participatory wisdom. You can use such exercises for their educational value, or as an approach to action learning to guide specific transformational change by your group. You can also explore the pattern language in a group (or by yourself) by exploring any of the patterns listed as "related". Or, as a facilitator, you can have people share a question or a story from their own challenges, curiosity, knowledge or experience that relates to a pattern on a card in their hand.

How to get involved with the Wise Democracy Project

The easiest way to get involved is to sign up for the wise democracy project **newsletter** at wd-pl.com/newsletters/, where you can also read previous issues. In the newsletters you'll find project news, interesting articles, and announcements of upcoming events, including occasional **videoconference dialogues and webinars** with Tom Atlee and other wise democracy experts and change agents.

You can also participate by

- **supporting** the nonprofit work of our sponsor, the Co-Intelligence Institute co-intelligence.org/donations.html
- **spreading the word** about wise democracy and this pattern language and card deck in your networks and social media
- **ordering card decks** to share with friends and associates at wd-pl.com/orders.
- joining dialogues on the project's **Facebook** page facebook.com/WiseDemocracyPL/ or **Twitter** twitter.com/WiseDemocracy
- **offering your thoughts and suggestions** as comments on Wise Democracy Project webpages, including the pages of specific patterns. We are particularly interested in any suggestions about improving this boxed card deck — which you can send to cii@igc.org.

Through all these means you will connect with others in the informal wise democracy pattern language **community of practice**, where you can share ideas, applications, and learning experiences for mutual benefit and enhanced impact.

Part Two: What Is Wise Democracy?

Our 3-D Wise Democracy Venn Diagram

A simple and insightful way to explore democracy is through the lenses of

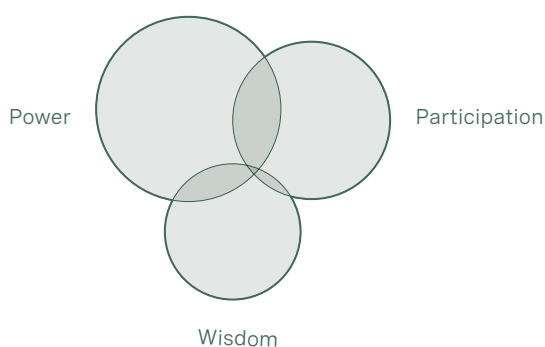
- **power,**
- **participation, and**
- **the wisdom.**

All three of these “dimensions of democracy” are always present to some degree, and each can be improved. We keep them in mind and often explore them using a Venn diagram of three overlapping circles. The diagram helps us remember that the more that power, participation and wisdom overlap and synergize, the more substantially “three-dimensional” democracy becomes, and thus more able to foster the long-term wellbeing of all life.

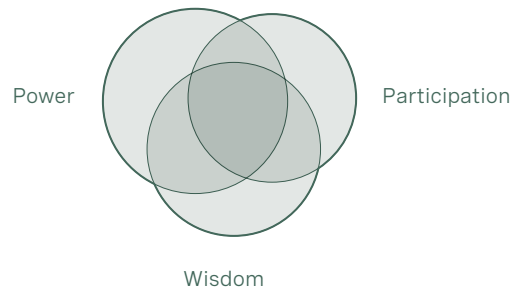
The **Power** dimension includes how, and how effectively things are decided and implemented. The **Participation** dimension covers who is included in deciding and implementing policies and activities and what perspectives are welcomed in the process. The **Wisdom** dimension deals with the quality of the resulting outcomes: To the extent we are being collectively wise, we are taking into account factors that can generate long-term broad benefit.

The wise democracy approach seeks to enhance all these dimensions in an integrated way. Ideally, all politics and governance would be effective, participatory, *and* wise.

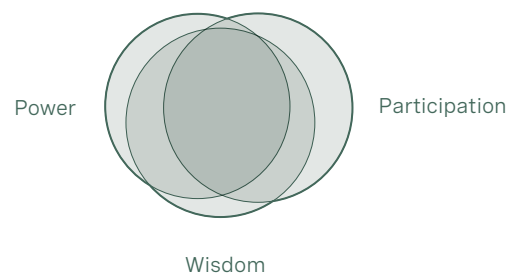
The first set of overlapping ovals (or circles) in our wise democracy Venn diagram (below) suggests the relative roles of these three dimensions as they exist in our current quasi-democratic systems. Power dominates, and there is little overlap between the dimensions and precious little resulting wisdom.



The second illustration (below) represents the developmental trajectory proposed by our wise democracy approach: Here we find more balance among the three dimensions and more overlap between them – more participatory power, more collectively generated wisdom, more wise exercise of power, etc.



The final illustration (on the next page) represents a truly wise democracy of the future. The three dimensions would be larger and essentially coincide with each other. In reality they would just be different dimensions or manifestations of the same activity. In this case, we would have a lot of powerful public wisdom and wise participatory power at work in our public affairs.



Wise participatory power

So we can productively ask what democracy would look like...

- if **Power** were more wholesome, participatory and wise...
- if **Participation** were more inclusive, wise and empowered... and
- if the outcomes of our political activity demonstrated collective **Wisdom** that was more comprehensive, participatory and effective.

That is the challenge and mission we see for our wise democracy approach to political transformation.

Four Guidelines for Promoting Democratic Wisdom

In our wise democracy theory and design work, we define **wisdom** as the capacity to take into account what needs to be taken into account for long-term broad benefit.

According to this definition, we can't *know* that a decision or action is wise — that it has generated long-term broad benefit — until long after it goes into effect. *However*, there are many things we *can* do to significantly increase the probability that our decisions and actions *will* be wise. These are delineated in the four general guidelines below and specifically embodied in the 96 patterns in our wise democracy pattern language. Here are the four guidelines:

We believe it is obvious that our activities and societies can be more collectively and effectively wise, to the extent we...

1. **Avoid** — Avoid doing and using things that would naturally tend to generate collective stupidity and folly over the long haul (such as bias, falsehoods, conformity, and corruption).
2. **Use** — Use everything that could help us generate potent collective intelligence, wisdom and broad benefit over the long haul (such as quality information, consideration of diverse perspectives, compassion, and systems thinking).
3. **Act** — Take collective action guided by what we learn as we seek to apply these principles.
4. **Learn** — Learn from reality about the wisdom of our actions (such as by being open to feedback, studying results, and periodically deliberating newly on the same topics). Reality will reveal any important overlooked factors and suggest new insights and possibilities.

These may seem obvious and overly general, but there is much we can and need to know about how to do each one of them. That's one of the great gifts of this pattern language — it helps us learn how to do and use these four guidelines, as groups, communities, organizations, networks, movements, and whole societies and civilizations.

A final note: The fact that we can't know ahead of time which actions we take will end up being wise means that wise democracy is more a vision to be pursued than a goal that can finally be achieved. We can work towards a "wise"

democracy just as we can work towards a "just" society. We can never arrive at absolute wisdom or total justice, but striving towards such inspiring visions helps us bring about progressively "wiser" democracies and "more just" societies.

And all the patterns in this pattern language are intended to help us make that progress.

Our Prime Directive

Our wise democracy vision's most important principle — its "prime directive" — calls on us to *evoke and engage the wisdom and resourcefulness of the whole on behalf of the whole*. This essay explores what that statement means.

Why and How This is Our Wise Democracy Vision's "Prime Directive"

We need and want the right **wisdom** to discern what will bring the most benefit to whatever "whole" we are considering — e.g., all beings, whole communities, whole systems, etc., ... and the **resourcefulness** for that wisdom to have influence in the real world. The more of the whole we can engage in this collective mission, the more insight and capacity will become available, thus increasing the probability of bringing about the greatest good over the longest term.

Each pattern in this wise democracy pattern language (WDPL) is a particular window into our prime directive and provides its own particular guidance on how to pursue wise democracy. Thus our understanding of the WDPL can be greatly enhanced by understanding this prime directive more deeply. Let's examine its parts.

"Evoke and Engage"

The word "**evoke**" in our wise democracy prime directive **means to bring into full being what is already present in potential form**. We want to stimulate, enable, awaken, call forth, or catalyze the latent wisdom and resourcefulness we need. This is more about energizing and liberating than forcing, controlling or building.

"Engage" means to bring into action and operation the wisdom and resourcefulness that have been called forth and catalyzed. We want to invite and facilitate that newly available wisdom and resourcefulness to play their best roles in our efforts to generate long-term broad benefits.

Both these words suggest that desirable effects can be generated with little or no investment of outside energy since so much is already present. Such effects occur through deep understanding and responsive interaction that welcomes existing energies into co-creative partnerships for mutually beneficial ends. Familiar examples of this include jazz improvisation, permaculture and Aikido.

“Wisdom”

As noted earlier, in our wise democracy theory and its associated pattern language, we say that **wisdom is the capacity to take into account what needs to be taken into account for long-term broad benefit.**

The elements of this definition — especially “long-term”, “broad”, and “benefit” — are not clear, solid realities so much as general principles appropriately subject to shared exploration, discernment, and ongoing evolution. This is quite similar to the way other democratic and “the pursuit of happiness” are continually debated in political discourse. The ongoing clarification and evolution of such concepts are fundamental to the health and evolution of democracy itself.

As we foster wise democracy, we try to understand to what extent we are taking into account what needs to be taken into account in order to produce long-term broad benefits. As circumstances change, we ask this question again and again. We know that wisdom is more a flexible capacity and an ongoing journey than a static attribute or achievement.

“Resourcefulness”

The word **resourcefulness** in our wise democracy prime directive **means the ability to realize, generate and apply whatever resources and capacities are needed to address the challenges we face — especially those resources and capacities which, while quite real, are not fully visible or available.**

“The whole”

In our wise democracy theory and patterns the phrase “the whole” refers to at least five different manifestations or dimensions of wholeness:

1. **The whole thing** — the whole community, situation, or system being considered, and all the capacities people and other entities bring (or can bring) to it. We might ask: *Who*

or what is involved in creating the situation we’re addressing, and who and what needs to be included to move it in positive directions?

2. **The whole context** — all the surrounding factors that shape what’s going on. We might ask: *To what extent are we considering the larger settings within which the players act and their situation unfolds?*
3. **Holistic attitudes** — this includes appreciation for the fullness of what exists, our participation in it, and humility in knowing there’s always more involved than we realize. We might ask: *How can we honor the realities in and around us and our roles while creatively facing the fact that we’re almost surely missing important factors?*
4. **Wholeness itself** — the qualities that make wholes more than mere collections of parts, like synergy. We might ask: *How can we attend to and creatively use factors that make wholeness itself a powerful resource?*
5. **Ultimate realities** — anything that embraces, permeates and/or transcends all of existence. We might ask: *What wisdom and resourcefulness can we tap from nature, spirit, and other ubiquitous factors, forces and intelligences beyond our usual limited human ways of knowing and engaging?*

To most deeply and truly serve life, we need to involve ourselves with the whole in all these ways, both in what we are trying to do and achieve and in how we are trying to do it.

When we relate to something as a whole or explore it as a whole, we have access to more dimensions, qualities and capacities than when we treat it as a collection of separate parts or aspects — or, worse yet, when we mindlessly attend to only a few of those parts or aspects as if they constituted the whole picture.

For more on all aspects of our prime directive, see wd-pl.com/prime-directive/.

Part Three: References

Glossary

Here are definitions of terms used in naming some of the patterns that may be unfamiliar to you — including special meanings or connotations for some familiar words.

Capacitance — the ability to abide (more or less comfortably) with/in uncertainty, disturbance, challenge, complexity, conflict, irresolution, etc.

Citizen — a resident or member — especially an engaged or politically active member (whether or not officially certified) — of an established place (community, society, state, world, etc.).

Commons — anything that is openly (or rightfully) shared by all members of a community or society. **"Commoning"** is the act of creating or claiming, defending and caring for, and mindfully using and stewarding a commons.

Field — a potent energy-space which brings forth and shapes what's next — e.g., "field of influence".

Generative — evoking and/or nurturing greater creativity.

Glocal — embracing both global and local — geographically and situationally (e.g., both hometown and planet) and/or cognitively (e.g., both universal and particular).

Deep Time — embracing the full extension of time (and often its evolutionary unfolding), including the distant and recent past, the textured reality and potency of the present, and a broad sense of possibilities and probabilities in the near and distant future.

Deliberation — thoughtful, thorough consideration of the factors relevant in a situation and the possibilities for resolving it, creatively engaging with it, or transcending it entirely.

Governance — the management of collective affairs (institutionalized government being only one approach to or facet of that function).

Holistic — embracing, engaging with and through, and utilizing (a) the whole (of a life, topic, population, situation, resource, etc.), and (b) the dynamics and dimensions of wholeness (e.g., synergy, vitality, spirit, mutuality, flow, resolution, integrity, etc.).

Integral — having diverse parts or aspects well integrated into a coherent whole with its own qualities above and beyond those of its parts or

aspects, often to such an extent that the parts or aspects become reflections or manifestations of the whole.

Life Energy — that which motivates a living being, organism or system from within — ranging from urges, feelings and needs, to interests, passions and love, to purposes, values, visions, longings, callings and aspirations.

Metabolize — to transform something (often by deconstructing it) in ways that help get more value from it, when in its original form it would be useless or even toxic.

Microcosm — a group that reflects (to a greater or lesser degree) the diversity or characteristics of a larger community or population.

Polarities — seemingly opposite or incompatible ideas, energies, etc., that are fundamentally related to each other, such that efforts to eliminate or maximize one pole evoke unhealthy manifestations, imbalances or reactions in the other and/or in the whole system they share. Although polarities are often experienced as problematic, we cannot "solve" a polarity, but we can seek to facilitate healthy balance or synergy between the poles or to transcend them.

Political Will — determination and commitment to a particular approach for addressing a public issue, concern or problem — often, but not only, among diverse players in support of official decision-makers.

Power-over — the underlying dynamics of management, direction, domination, control, destruction, etc.; the effort or capacity to get specific things to happen regardless of obstacles. (Power-over is usually contrasted with power-with, or cooperation.)

Regenerativity — the capacity of a living entity to continually renew, promote or develop its wholeness, health and functionality.

Social Capital — the quantity, density and quality of interpersonal, intragroup and/or intergroup relationships that can potentially be engaged to address shared concerns or projects.

Sortition — random selection used in political systems and governance.

Stakeholder — any (type of) person, group, or life form that plays a role — or could play a significant role — in a particular realm or situation in which all such entities are involved. They all influence and/or are impacted by how it unfolds — and thus they will collectively determine (and can change!) what happens next.

Story — a sense, experience or articulation of an event, unfolding of events, or pattern of events — past, present or future — real and/or imagined. This is usually accompanied by an interpretation of those events — of their meaning and their impact on those involved.

Subsidiarity — the principle that governance functions should be managed at the lowest level they can effectively be addressed. Subsidiarity covers all scales but with a bias towards decentralization.

Transpartisan — a person, activity or attitude where secure partisan identity co-exists with open, respectful, curious and potentially co-creative engagement with the other side(s) of a partisan divide.

Universal Intelligence — transpersonal forms of intelligence (cognitive potential or the dynamics or traces of cognition at work) manifesting or accessible in shared cultural, natural, cosmic, and/or spiritual realms.

Universal Participation — the principle (or recognition) of ongoing co-creation by virtually all entities in the unfolding of any given situation — and the implications of that for causality, responsibility, blame, inclusion, etc.

Pattern Languages

A pattern language is an interlinked, coherent collection of design guidances intended to support the creation of a vibrant, wholesome, valued human activity or artifact. Each pattern is intended to help address a design challenge one often encounters when undertaking such a project. And each pattern is linked to other patterns that could usefully be attended to at the same time.

The first pattern language was innovated by architect Christopher Alexander and a team who identified 253 “patterns” in remarkable communities around the world characterized by what Alexander called “the quality that has no name” — which he later associated with aliveness, wholeness, and spirit. In 1977 he and his team published a book about architecture, urban design and community livability entitled *A Pattern Language* which soon became a model for others, including other architects, computer programmers, curriculum designers, and a variety of change agents. This wise democracy pattern language (WDPL) was particularly influenced by a valuable group process pattern language — GroupWorksDeck.org.

Tom Atlee was one of about four dozen process-oriented people who worked for three years creating that pattern language. He got the idea for publishing the WDPL as a deck of cards from the founders of the GroupWorks deck, and the design of the WDPL cards is heavily influenced by their cards.

People Behind the Project

Tom Atlee

Tom Atlee is the main author and editor of the first two versions of this wise democracy pattern language. He is vice president and research director of the Co-Intelligence Institute, a nonprofit organization he cofounded in 1996. His early co-intelligence research in the late 1980s focused on the relationship between group dynamics and collective intelligence. Beginning in the mid-1990s through the mid-2000s, his focus shifted to developing society's capacity to function as a wise democracy. From 2005–2010 he explored possibilities for the conscious evolution of social systems, grounded in a sacred science-based understanding of evolutionary dynamics. During 2011–2015 he focused on public wisdom, co-intelligent economics and participatory sustainability. Seeking more practice-based ways to engage people around the idea of wise democracy, he began doing courses and developing a community of practice around a wise democracy pattern language. He hopes these intertwined, expanding explorations can help channel the roiling energies surrounding our 21st century social and environmental crises into positive possibilities and system-transforming initiatives. He has authored four books and many essays for his blogs and websites, as well as dozens of essays and chapters for other books and journals, in addition to convening and speaking at leading-edge conferences and public engagements. You can contact Tom Atlee at cii@igc.org.

Martin Rausch

Martin sparked this project by offering to support Tom in creating a pattern language for wise democracy — and then doing exactly that. During their nine month co-creative journey in 2016–2017, Martin brilliantly facilitated the pattern language's development and designed the wise democracy website. In 2019 he managed the project to update and expand the pattern language and get it published as a card deck.

Martin is passionate about researching, promoting and co-designing structures and processes which enable groups or society to deal more adequately with current and future major challenges. Martin works mainly in Europe leading workshops, facilitating, coaching and creating short videos on participatory processes. Besides working with Tom on this pattern language he has initiated a reality show and a documentary project to display the challenge and power of well-designed and facilitated citizen deliberations and other innovative democratic processes. He can be reached at martin.rausch@hrcomm.ch.

Other key players

Major organizing partners in this project have included **Margaret Anderson, Manju Lyn Bazzell, Rosa Zubizarreta, and Andy Paice. Tree Bressen and Peggy Holman** were pattern language thinking partners before the WDPL was even conceived.

Major funders have included **Mike Abate, Dick Atlee, Diana Morley, Kevin Reidy and Rosa Zubizarreta.**

Welcome to the Journey!

How many people have ever imagined that democracy could be wise? How many people know that hundreds of separate approaches exist that could make that vision a reality – if only their diverse pieces of the puzzle were fit together in mutually reinforcing ways?

You are now on the leading edge of that journey of realization – of awakening to this possibility and helping make it happen. Many of your companions on this journey believe that the existential issues emerging all around us can only be adequately addressed with empowered, participatory collective wisdom. The guidance all of us need to meet this unprecedented challenge and opportunity is provided by the wisdom in these cards, by the resources and conversations we generate around them on behalf of life, and by the future versions of this pattern language which will be co-created by us all.

By exploring this WDPL version 2.0 you have stepped into an immense journey with hundreds of other people. We welcome your participation, your questions, your ideas, your stories, and the difference you make through your use of these cards and the WDPL website.

You may wonder ...

- What other activities can I do with these cards?
- What standards guided the creation and articulation of these patterns?
- Have the patterns been categorized or presented in any other ways?
- What are some examples of how the patterns have been used to analyze democratic practices or innovations?
- Is there more theory on wise democracy that I could learn from?
- Are there limitations to keep in mind when using this pattern language?

If you have questions like these, you can find answers to them on the WD-PL FAQ page wd-pl.com/FAQ.

We look forward to your ongoing involvement.