

EMPOWERING VOTERS

Welcome to your role in the ever-evolving project of our joint future! If you are reading this book, it means that you are already impacting the life of many people!

As you turn the pages of this book, keep at the forefront of your mind a crucial perspective: elections and voting stretch beyond the sphere of politicians and government officials. This narrative is about us – The People. It is an exploration of how we, as individuals and as a collective, are interwoven into the fabric of our governance system. This book aims to be a lighthouse, steering you toward greater awareness and participation as both a citizen and a voter.

As you embark on this journey, remember the essence of shaping our shared destiny doesn't solely rest in the hands of elected officials but in the daily choices and actions we all take. This book is a homage to the roles we each play in crafting the policies and laws that navigate our lives. It calls you to action – to engage, to question, and to add to the ongoing dialogue that fuels a dynamic and better joint future.

Let this be your guide to navigating the complexities of our society with a newfound sense of responsibility and empowerment!

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Maggy MacNikol

EMPOWERING VOTERS

A Beginner's Guide

for Citizens, Policymakers, and Future Advocates

THE WORLD IN THE MAKING PROJECT



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CHAPTER 6

Building bridges and the power of collaboration

This chapter delves into the critical role of civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in bridging the gap among the citizens, the government, and policymakers to address complex societal challenges. Highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts, it explores how collaboration can effectively tackle issues like climate change, poverty, and human rights. The chapter emphasizes the necessity of enhancing policy-making through collective engagement, suggesting that active collaboration with civil society and participation in policy dialogue can lead to more informed and inclusive policy decisions.

Focusing on the significant impact of such collaborations on improving public services in areas such as education, health, and housing – especially for youth and vulnerable populations – the chapter argues for the development of customized frameworks. These frameworks should be adaptable to the unique governance and policy-making contexts of different countries, ensuring that solutions are both relevant and effective.

Alice and Fabio in search for a common ground

In the green valleys of Northern Italy, where the Alps stretch towards the sky, the small town of Greenville found itself at the heart of a debate that rippled across nations. This is where our story

unfolds, about Alice and Fabio, whose lives were intertwined by their divergent views on a single issue: the No TAV movement.

Alice, a spirited environmental activist, was a key supporter of the No TAV movement. Her connection to the land was deep-rooted, passed down through generations who had tilled the soil and cherished the natural beauty of their homeland. To Alice, the proposed high-speed train, slicing through the heart of the Susa Valley to connect Turin in Italy with Lyon in France, symbolized a disregard for the environment and the sanctity of local communities. She saw it as an invasion, a metal serpent that would disrupt ecosystems and upend the lives of thousands, all for a project she believed was mired in economic and ecological short-sightedness.

Fabio, on the other hand, was an advocate for progress and innovation. A young engineer with dreams, he envisioned the high-speed train as a beacon of modernity and a step towards a more connected Europe. Inspired by the success of train networks in the Benelux countries, which had significantly enhanced connectivity and economic growth, Fabio argued that the TAV would bring similar benefits to Italy and France. He saw it as an opportunity to foster trade, tourism, and cultural exchange between the two nations, creating a future where distances were shortened and opportunities expanded.

Their debates were passionate and frequent, often taking place in the town's quaint café, where cups of espresso sat forgotten amidst the fervour of their discussions. Alice would argue that the true cost of the train could not be measured in euros alone but in the loss of biodiversity, water sources, and the heritage of the Susa Valley. Fabio, with equal passion, would counter that the project was a step towards reducing carbon emissions by offering a greener alternative to car and air travel. He talked about economic revitalization, jobs, and the importance of keeping pace with a rapidly changing world.

For Fabio the train was not just a mode of transportation but a symbol of future possibilities.

One afternoon, they found themselves in their favourite café, the air thick with the aroma of espresso and dispute.

“Fabio, how can you not see the damage this train will do? It’s not just about our town; it’s about protecting our environment, our heritage. The Susa Valley deserves better than to be carved up for the sake of convenience.”

“Alice, I do see your point, but you’re missing the bigger picture. This train is about more than just cutting travel times; it’s about connecting communities, reducing road traffic, and yes, even protecting the environment in the long run by offering a cleaner alternative.”

“A cleaner alternative at what cost? Destroying ecosystems, consuming massive resources, and for what? A project mired in controversy and opposition? We should be investing in truly sustainable solutions, not this,” Alice replied.

“But think about the economic boost, the jobs. And it’s not just about us – it’s about future generations. The train network in the Benelux countries revolutionized travel and brought people closer. Why deny ourselves and future Italians and French the same benefits?”

Their debate reflected the town’s divide, a microcosm of the broader struggle between progress and preservation. Yet, beneath their arguments lay a mutual respect and a shared love for their homeland. As the conversation cooled, they both looked out the café window, pondering the future of the Susa Valley. In that moment, they understood that their debate was but one of many, all necessary in the search for a balanced path forward.

“I suppose we both want what’s best for our valley, even if we disagree on what that looks like.”

“Exactly, Alice. Let’s promise to keep this dialogue open, to listen to each other, and work towards a solution that honours both our heritage and our future,” Fabio emphasized.

In the end, their story is not just about a disagreement but about the possibility of finding common ground in the most unexpected places.

“The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members.”

- Coretta Scott King¹⁹

Citizens and their power for social change

Citizen movements are becoming increasingly popular as people recognize the power they hold to create significant social change. Citizen movements refer to collective actions taken by individuals who are passionate about a particular issue and want to bring about change in their communities. These movements can be organized around a variety of causes, including environmental sustainability, civil rights, political advocacy, and social justice.

Citizen movements are compelling because they are driven by the personal and collective experiences of individuals who are passionate about a particular issue. This passion often leads to creative and effective strategies for social change that can challenge established power structures and bring about lasting transformation. As social media and other digital platforms have made it easier for people to connect and share information, citizen movements have

¹⁹ For more information on Coretta Scott King, see “Quoted Voices” section at the end of the book.