



WHERE: **Copenhagen, Denmark**

WHAT: **Deliberative Event**

WHEN: **7–8 December 2023**

## DENMARK

# EUROPEAN POLICY LAB

## (‘EUROPAPOLITISK POLICY LAB’)

On **7–8 December 2023**, approximately 50 citizens and representatives from civil society organisations (CSOs) gathered in Copenhagen for this Policy Lab. The event focused on rethinking economic governance within the framework of the European Semester, emphasising pathways for integrating wellbeing and sustainability into policymaking.

The Lab involved a two-day in-person event preceded by three online sessions. Participants worked collaboratively to develop policy recommendations that address complex economic and environmental challenges. The initiative demonstrated the potential of deliberative methods for involving citizens in complex policy discussions, and also highlighted areas for improvement, such as knowledge-building and effectively integrating citizens’ insights into policy processes.



The deliberative experiment was organised by [Nyt Europa](#), a Danish CSO working on capacity building and involvement of civil society and citizens in EU policies focusing on rights, climate and youth, in collaboration with [We Do Democracy](#), a Danish CSO and consultancy with expertise in the concept, design, and operation of deliberative events, including the respective facilitation techniques. The event formed part of the EU research project [REAL DEAL](#). Nyt Europa contributed thematic framing and engagement with the European Semester process, while We Do Democracy provided process expertise.

Vision development session

## BEFORE THE EVENT: PREPARATION

The preparatory phase involved extensive research to ensure that the Policy Lab was well informed and aligned with the European Semester framework. Organisers analysed the complexities of the Semester process, including its governance structure, annual timelines, and key outputs such as the [Annual Sustainable Growth Survey](#) (ASGS) and [Country-Specific Recommendations](#) (CSRs).

The research showed that the European Semester process offers few mechanisms for incorporating external input from stakeholders outside the institutional framework. Further, the Semester's focus on coordinating economic, fiscal, and social policies among Member States requires significant technical expertise, which can be a barrier for citizens and civil society organisations lacking access to such knowledge.

### TOPIC FRAMING

The topic in the Danish case was developed based on the aforementioned analysis of the European Semester and its ASGS, the report that puts forward the EU's economic and social priorities with the official aim of placing sustainability and social inclusion at the centre of economic policymaking. Based on the preconditions for effective deliberation and insights from the analysis of the ASGS, the central topic of the Policy Lab was dubbed 'economic thinking', denoting a focus on the ways in which economics is interconnected with climate and biodiversity issues. The Lab centred on addressing the critical question: **"How should we design the economic framework governing EU policymaking so that it enhances the wellbeing of humans and the planet?"**

According to deliberative principles, it is important that the organisers are aware of the very many potential perspectives when deciding on a suitable approach to a given topic, and should avoid overly controlling how the topic is framed or discussed. If participants feel that the agenda is too narrowly defined or biased, they may perceive this as a lack of agency, reducing their ability to shape the conversation in a meaningful way. The process requires a thematic structure, but the topic should function as a signpost, providing direction without predetermining outcomes or restricting participants' ability to explore different perspectives. This approach provides sufficient space for an open, inclusive, and participant-driven dialogue rather than top-down control.

## RECRUITMENT

The aim of the Danish case was to recruit 50 participants, encompassing both citizens and representatives from CSOs. While CSOs play a pivotal role in the Semester process, the selection criteria for participation are often unclear and the group of participating stakeholders/CSOs remains quite narrow. In response, the Lab extended invitations to a broader spectrum of CSOs in order to enlarge the understanding of the Semester process and empower more civil society actors to provide substantive policy inputs. Participants were recruited by an open call, inviting individuals to enrol for the event, and directly inviting in the networks of Nyt Europa and other CSOs. Given the intricacy of the subject matter, random selection of participants was considered as less desirable: While acknowledging that the participants will not mirror Danish society, priority was accorded to individuals demonstrating a robust interest and some prior understanding of the subject matter ("interested citizens"), combined with individuals from CSOs. The event was considered as a stepping stone towards a citizen assembly (with random selection), and aimed at gaining experience with deliberations on that topic.

### KNOWLEDGE PREPARATION – WEBINAR SERIES

It is important, when deciding on a topic, to reflect on how it allows for the development of subtopics through the deliberation itself, and to provide the participants with a compass but maintain their autonomy to decide on the direction. To provide the best possible tools for guiding the participants, the project team organised an easy-to-read information package of critical perspectives on economics and the EU, including envisioning utopian scenarios.

The type of knowledge provided for the participants as a fundament for the deliberation had to be well scoped in order to do justice to the topic and to be digestible. Working with a complex topic and policy issues that could feel rather far removed from participants' everyday lives, a knowledge upgrade was crucial to initiating a deliberative conversation and to get everyone on a common basis of knowledge.

Striking the appropriate balance between complexity and empowerment is crucial; the level of complexity must be sufficient to meaningfully engage participants in the topics while, on the other hand, refraining from content that is so technical and complex that it risks discouraging participants from taking part in the event or engaging with the subject.

Three online training sessions (webinars) for participants were conducted prior to the Policy Lab, to ensure that participants shared a common knowledge base that would allow everyone to speak up at the event. Besides preparation and knowledge-building, the purpose of the capacity-building webinars also was to begin relationship-building prior to the in-person event. The participants were divided into breakout groups and were able to reflect on the knowledge provided and share their immediate thoughts. The webinar sessions focused on the following topics:

Each webinar began with an expert presentation the respective topic, which was followed by breakout discussions in which participants engaged in smaller groups to reflect on the content, exchange perspectives, and connect with one another.

The webinars were held over three weeks, with each session lasting 1.5 hours (17:00–18:30 hr). This timing was chosen to accommodate a wide range of participants, including those with daytime commitments. For those unable to attend live, the webinars were recorded and made available, ensuring flexibility and inclusivity.

For the facilitators, preparations included attending a dedicated training session focusing on feminist moderation principles and power dynamics, which emphasise inclusivity, equity, and relational trust-building.

Further, the facilitators completed an [online course on feminist moderation](#) created by the CSO Women Engage for a Common Future (WECE). The goal was to equip facilitators to manage power dynamics in discussions and to foster a safe and respectful environment in which all participants feel valued and heard.

### Session 1: Introduction to the European Semester and the European Economy

Although highly technical, the participants were presented for EU financial policy frameworks and processes. This provided them with a more concrete understanding of the issues related to the Semester process, so to apply the new perspectives and spark reflection prior to the deliberative event.

### Session 2: New Economic Thinking

“New economic thinking” gives perspective and provides a glossary and toolbox for understanding economic policy differently and thereby empowering participants to dare engage with economic issues.

### Session 3: Utopian Thinking

Utopian thinking is an efficient tool for visionary policy development. The utopian perspective provided a backbone for the deliberative process, as it gives a framework at hand for imagining policies that respond to current issues.

Working on recommendations







Working on recommendations

## DURING THE EVENT

### KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

In addition to the webinar series and information package, knowledge was built during the event through a structured process of dialogue, expert input, and collaborative visioning. The Lab began with a discussion of a background report, introducing key policy processes, the concept of 'beyond growth', and the significance of working with visions. This was followed by an expert 'speed-dating' session, where participants engaged with specialists on themes such as consumption, energy, and biodiversity, deepening their understanding through diverse perspectives. The knowledge gained was then applied in a visioning workshop, where participants collaboratively drafted utopian visions and core ideas, fostering creative thinking and collective knowledge production. Through this iterative approach – combining foundational knowledge, expert input, and collaborative discussion – participants developed and expanded their knowledge in a dynamic and interactive manner.

### FACILITATION AND INTERACTION

The in-person event was held over two days to balance relationship-building and intensive policy work.

The combination of expert-led presentations and interactive breakout sessions allowed participants to engage meaningfully with complex topics while building relationships with fellow attendees. This approach enhanced participants' confidence and preparedness, contributing to richer, more informed deliberations during the in-person event.

### Day 1: Vision Development

- **Icebreakers and Trust-Building:** The event began with icebreaker activities to help participants feel comfortable and build trust.
- **Expert Inputs and Speed-Dating:** Experts from various fields provided short and focused insights on sustainability, energy, and economic transformation, followed by brief conversations between participants and experts. This allowed them to quickly absorb technical insights and then apply them in their subsequent discussions. The format was interactive, accessible, and provided direct access to expertise without overwhelming participants with lengthy presentations.
- **Vision Workshop:** Breakout group discussions worked on collaboratively imagining a sustainable and equitable economic future. Participants were guided to articulate shared visions, which formed the foundation for subsequent policy recommendations. This approach encouraged creativity and collective ownership of ideas, bridging the gap between abstract thinking and actionable outcomes.

### Day 2: Policy Development

- **Thematic Breakouts:** On the second day, participants selected specific topics to focus on and worked in groups to draft detailed recommendations. Facilitators supported these sessions in order to maintain focus and inclusivity. Thematic breakouts allowed participants to dive deeper into topics of interest, leveraging their expertise and experience.
- **Collaborative Policy Work:** Teams developed specific recommendations through facilitated deliberations.
- **Voting and Feedback:** Preliminary recommendations were refined through plenary discussions and feedback rounds. The goal was to discuss potential adjustments and reach consensus among the participants.

## Summarised agenda of the in-person event

Day 1	
30 minutes	<b>Introduction: purpose and programme overview</b>
30 minutes	<b>Check-in and recap of online sessions</b>
30 minutes	<b>Panel discussion</b>
15 minutes	<i>Break</i>
60 minutes	<b>Expert speed-dating</b>
15 minutes	<i>Break</i>
120 minutes	<b>Vision development</b>
30 minutes	<b>Wrap-up and preview of Day 2</b>

Day 2	
15 minutes	<b>Welcome to Day 2</b>
30 minutes	<b>Identification of topics</b>
135 minutes	<b>Deliberation in breakout groups</b>
45 minutes	<i>Lunch</i>
30 minutes	<b>Feedback and preliminary voting</b>
60 minutes	<b>Working on recommendations</b>
30 minutes	<i>Break</i>
45 minutes	<b>Refining recommendations</b>
30 minutes	<b>Final voting</b>
45 minutes	<b>Wrap-up</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy Lab produced several actionable recommendations, categorised into the thematic areas (see Annex)

- Citizen involvement for better health and wellbeing
- Climate and biodiversity
- Value and consumption
- The EU's global responsibility and role in the world.

## AFTER THE EVENT

### DOCUMENTATION AND FEEDBACK

The post-event phase of the Policy Lab focused on gathering feedback to assess the success of the deliberation process and implementing further activities to amplify the impact of the recommendations developed during the event. Further, participants were invited to join future initiatives, with the aim of fostering continuity among engaged stakeholders.

The policy recommendations were compiled into a comprehensive [policy report](#), which included detailed documentation of the process and a project description to ensure transparency and provide a clear understanding of the initiative.

The graphic consists of two parts. On the left is the cover of a report with a dark green background. At the top left, it says 'nyt Europa' and 'REAL DEAL'. The main title is 'EUROPA-POLITISK POLICY LAB' in large white letters. Below it, in smaller white letters, is 'POLITISKE ANBEFALINGER OG DOKUMENTATION AF PROCESSEN'. On the right is a page from the report with a white background and green accents. The title is 'POLICY LABBETS OPGAVE OG MANDAT'. Below the title is a short paragraph in Danish. Further down is a section titled 'Hvordan skal vi indrette de økonomiske rammer, som EU arbejder under, så de er til gavn for både mennesker og planeten?'. Below this is another paragraph in Danish. At the bottom right of the page is a circular photograph showing a group of people in a meeting, with one man in the foreground looking towards the camera.



Looking at the results of the vision development session

## FOLLOW-UP

Unfortunately, the project was not anchored at the political level: it was not commissioned by a public body, and there was no political representation, which would have enhanced the impact of the deliberation. However, the recommendations generated during the Policy Lab were refined and utilised in various ways to maximise their impact and ensure they reached relevant stakeholders.

The policy report and recommendations were presented at public forums, including political festivals, sustainability events, and conferences, to raise awareness and encourage broader societal engagement:

- **European Commission Stakeholder Meeting in Denmark, January 2024:** The policy recommendations were included as part of the so-called 'fact-finding missions' for the European Semester's CSRs for Denmark.
- **EESC Civil Society Week, March 2023 & 2024:** Findings and experiences were discussed in two REAL DEAL/SDG Watch Europe sessions: [Can we democratise the European economy through the European Semester? \(2023\)](#) and [Democratising Economic Policy Making – Yes we can! \(2024\)](#)
- **Italian Sustainable Development Festival, May 2024:** In the course of the festival organised by ASviS, a joint event with the parallel deliberative event on the European Semester in Italy (also part of REAL DEAL) took place on 7 May. Several participants from the events in both countries came together, and the results of both were presented in an [online event on 8 May](#).
- **Wellbeing Economy Conference, May 2024:** The Policy Lab provided a point of departure for a [session on democratisation of the economy](#).
- **Folkemødet (Political Festival of Denmark):** Concept and findings were discussed at this significant political festival in June 2023 and in 2024.



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In the REAL DEAL project, researchers and civil society organisations worked together on green transition and democracy. They conducted research on deliberative methods to find out what works best for involving citizens on the European Green Deal.



REAL DEAL has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101037071. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## EUROPEAN POLICY LAB (‘EUROPAPOLITISK POLICY LAB’), DENMARK

(December 2023)

More information about the recommendations is provided in a [comprehensive report](#).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Citizen involvement for better health and wellbeing

- 1.2: Rethinking the framework of primary schools for better involvement and wellbeing.
- 1.2: Establishment of local citizen assemblies.
- 1.3: Granting fundamental rights to nature.
- 1.4: Rethinking the labour market and action plan for wellbeing.

#### Climate and biodiversity

- 2.1: New Danish approach to agricultural support and rethinking EU frameworks.
- 2.2: Benchmark for consumption-based climate footprint in Denmark (and in the EU).
- 2.3: Introduction of greenhouse gas tax for agriculture.
- 2.4: Structural change in Danish agriculture.

#### Value and consumption

- 3.1: Establishment of a research unit in the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission, focusing on quality of life as a guiding priority for EU policy formulation.
- 3.2: Focus on equality.
- 3.3: Development of genuinely sustainable business models and financing systems.
- 3.4: Focus on Interdisciplinarity.

#### The EU's global responsibility and role in the world

- 4.1: Global citizen involvement.
- 4.2: Fair distribution of human time and the Earth's resources.
- 4.3: Reduction of Denmark's global land use.
- 4.4: Compliance with international agreements.



## KEY INSIGHTS

**Citizen contribution: Deliberative methods enable interested citizens to meaningfully contribute to complex policy processes such as the European Semester.**

- Producing outputs from collective experiences provides valuable direction.
- Contributions often lack technical depth.
- No concrete mechanism exists to integrate contributed knowledge.
- While formal hooks are limited, findings can drive advocacy efforts and engage policymakers.

**Enriched discussions through new economic thinking: Incorporating perspectives from the wellbeing economy and new economic thinking provides frameworks for policy discussions and solutions.**

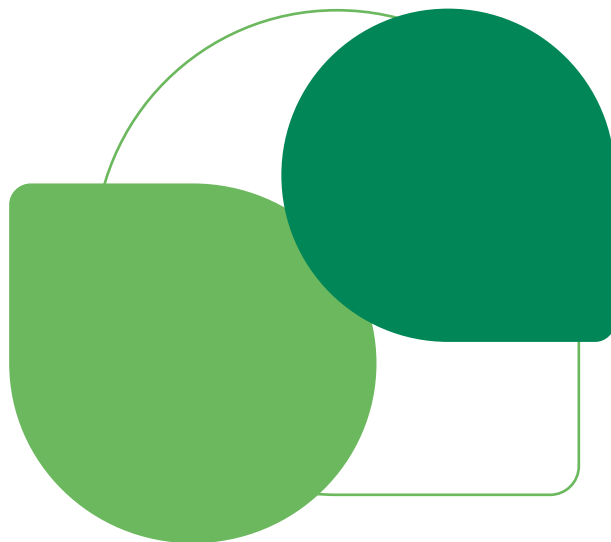
- New economic frameworks offer accessible knowledge, language, and concepts that encourage future-oriented thinking and attract new audiences.
- Finding the right balance between accessibility and technical depth is challenging.

**Experience and resources in deliberative processes: Civil society organisations need more experience with deliberative methods to build confidence in policy development.**

- A need to raise awareness of the value of engaging in EU processes such as the European Semester.
- Rethinking policy development strategies within civil society.

**Knowledge on economic policies: CSOs and citizens need a deeper understanding of economic policies, including the economic dimensions of sustainability.**

- Growing momentum and focus exist, but there is a lack of necessary capabilities.



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