



World Design Capital 2026 – Design & Democracy

DGTF CONFERENCE 2026: SHIFTING REGIMES, CHANGING ORDERS

German Society for Design Theory and Research (DGTF) in collaboration with Normative Orders (Goethe University Frankfurt/Main), Kunstgewerbemuseum/Design Campus SKD and Design and Democracy

June 25th – 26th 2026
Goethe University Frankfurt/Main

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Ecological urgency, technological acceleration, and political fragmentation destabilize the conditions under which democracy and design unfold. The conference interrogates their entangled trajectories amid shifting normative frameworks and changing regimes of power. It conceives design as a site of democratic contestation and democracy as a designed order, foregrounding their reciprocal capacity to structure imaginaries, practices, and institutions. As democratic institutions face populist, technocratic, and post-political pressures, design becomes a crucial site of both contestation and possibility. We ask: How do design discourses and practices respond to and co-shape emerging configurations of power, participation, and collective life? What regimes of sense-making, visibility, or action does design enable—or foreclose? How might design contribute to rethinking democratic agency, inclusion, and accountability amid collapsing certainties?

This call invites contributions that critically examine design's intersection with democratic systems under pressure: from contested infrastructures and algorithmic governance to citizen-led co-creation and institutional reconfiguration. Through interdisciplinary dialogue and practice-based inquiry, the conference aims to surface approaches and questions that push beyond normative assumptions, foregrounding design as mediator, amplifier, or disruptor within changing democratic landscapes.

We welcome contributions from academics, practitioners, activists, artists, and others working at the intersection of design and democracy. Contributions may take the form of papers, visual essays, projects, workshops, or interventions, addressing one or more of the following topics:

DEMOCRATIZING INSTITUTIONS OF CIVIC LIFE

Civic institutions play a significant part in disseminating, instituting, and mediating democratic practices in our everyday lives. From housing cooperatives to schools, and from museums to neighborhood activism, this track explores where and how democratic practices are enacted and what they leave in their wake. How do they build community, whom do they include or exclude, and what role do they play in repositioning these institutions of civic life in our contested present? How do local democratic innovations reshape larger systems of power?

SPACES OF ASSEMBLY AS ARENAS OF CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT

Public spaces have always been at the heart of democratic negotiations. Whether physical or digital, it is where different perspectives, interests, and voices converge. Drawing on Chantal Mouffe's concept of agonistic democracy, this track understands public spaces as places of constructive conflict: difference, contradiction, and dispute do not threaten democracy; rather, they form its living foundation. Both analogue and digital spaces offer

the opportunity to make dissent visible and productive. How can we design these spaces to remain open, accessible, and adaptable, enabling democratic debate and ensuring that the future remains open to diversity?

DIGITALITY AND DEMOCRACY

Platform infrastructures, data-intensive classification systems, and automated decision-making regimes increasingly structure civic participation, public discourse, and state governance. Yet these same systems normalize opacity, surveillance, and technocratic authority. This track interrogates design's entanglement with algorithmic governance, data extractivism, platform capitalism, and digital coloniality, while seeking counter-practices that reclaim technological agency and reimagine infrastructures for democratic accountability.

DEMOCRACY AND DESIGN EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Design and art schools and universities reproduce hierarchies of knowledge, power, and access, while simultaneously claiming to foster criticality and innovation. This track interrogates the politics of design pedagogy and institutional governance: how curricula, accreditation, and funding regimes shape democratic agency—or constrain it. Can design education cultivate capacities for democratic renewal, or is it structurally bound to reproduce the technocratic and market logics that undermine democracy itself?

INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM AND ECOLOGICAL FUTURES

The ecological crisis is inseparable from histories of colonialism, patriarchy, and racial capitalism. Intersectional feminist perspectives reveal how design has been complicit in sustaining extractivist economies, gendered exclusions, and ecological harm, while also offering tools for care, resistance, and reimagination. This track examines how feminist and decolonial approaches can reconfigure design's role in shaping democratic ecological futures, asking how practices of interdependence, justice, and solidarity might unsettle dominant imaginaries of governance, sustainability, and innovation.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Please submit an extended abstract of max. 400 words (excluding references) that clearly outlines your contribution's central argument, approach, and relevance to the conference themes and selected track. All abstracts will undergo a double-blind peer-review process. Authors of full papers (4000–6000 words) will submit finalized contributions after the conference, subject to another round of peer review. The conference will be held in English.

IMPORTANT DATES

March 27, 2026 – Abstract Submission Deadline

April 17, 2026 – Notification of Acceptance

June 25–26, 2026 – DGTF Conference, Goethe University Frankfurt

August 10th, 2026 – Deadline Full Papers

Fall 2026 – Publication of Proceedings

PUBLICATION

The conference explicitly welcomes a wide range of formats, but also provides the opportunity to publish full papers in the proceedings following the conference (to be published in the fall of 2026). The proceedings will be published digitally with ISBN and DOI.

Submission platform: To submit your abstract, please register with Conftool and follow instructions: <https://www.conftool.org/dgtf2026>
For any inquiry, please write us at conference@dgtf.de

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