

**Online Baltic Sea Symposium,  
17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2024**

***The green strategies and the role of NGOs  
in  
EU's Green Deal and NCM's Vision 2030***

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# Disposition

## Intro

**I. Why is the NGO activities important?**

**II. Which NGOs are most important for the green transition?**

**III: The role of NGOs in EUs Green deal and NCMs Vision 2030?**

**IV: Perspectives and Learning points!**



Miró: The wall of the moon, 1958



- Interfolk is a non-profit organisation founded in 2008.
- The mission is to examine and promote lifelong learning in the civil societies
- The activities include surveys, pilot work, courses and events in a Danish, Nordic, and European context.
- The focus has mainly been on cultural NGO activities with added community values

Last 15 years engaged in up to 30 international projects with support from

- EU programmes like Erasmus+, Creative Europe, and Europe for Citizens, both to projects and training courses.
- Nordic Baltic programmes, like Nordplus Adult and Nordic Culture Contact.
- Nordic Council of Ministers' support to NGO-cooperation in the Baltic Sea region.



Cross-cultural event in the yard of Vartov, Copenhagen

# I. Why is civil society and NGOs important - some sociological definitions

Most social theories agree that modern societies are differentiated into three main sectors, that interact in varied ways:

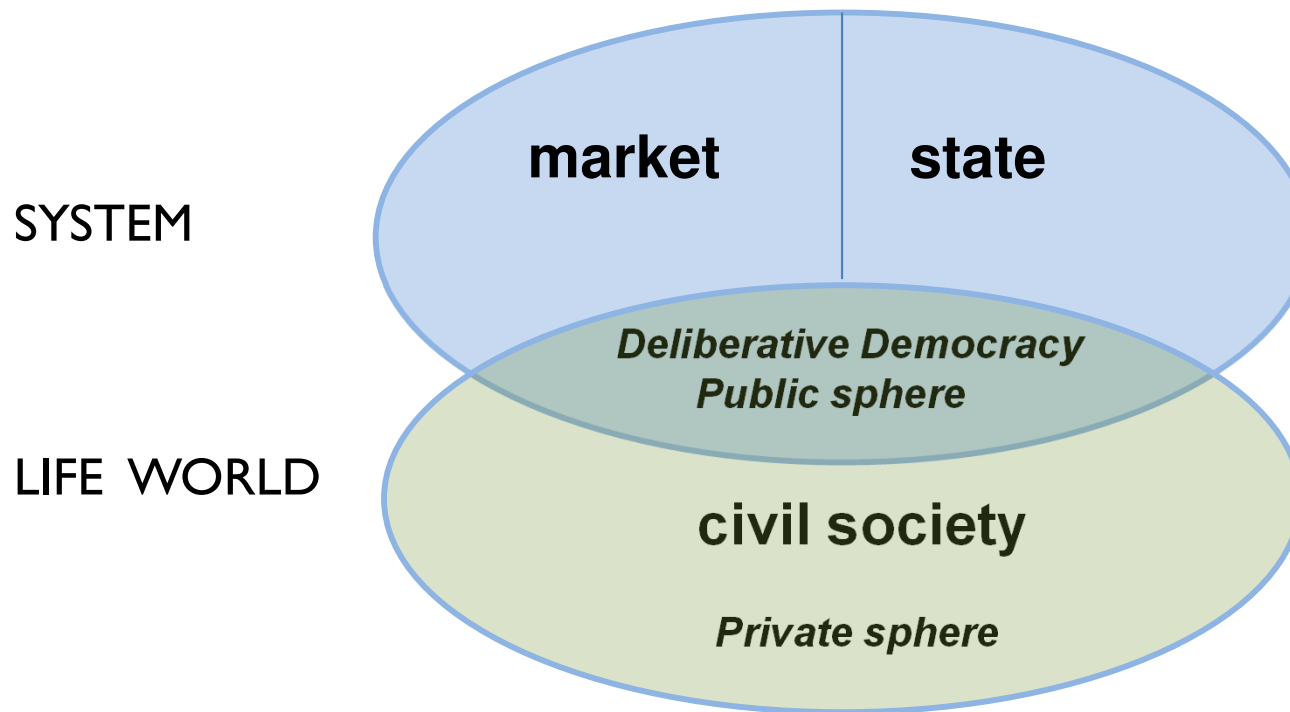
- **The public sector** - characterized by legal and bureaucratic rationality
- **The market sector** - characterized by economic rationality
- **The civil society** - characterized by communicative and expressive rationality

All three sectors are interdependent and have each important roles to fulfil in our societies.



# Habermas – Model of Society

**Technical - instrumental rationality**  
 (economic and bureaucratic rationality)  
 (How - on effective means)

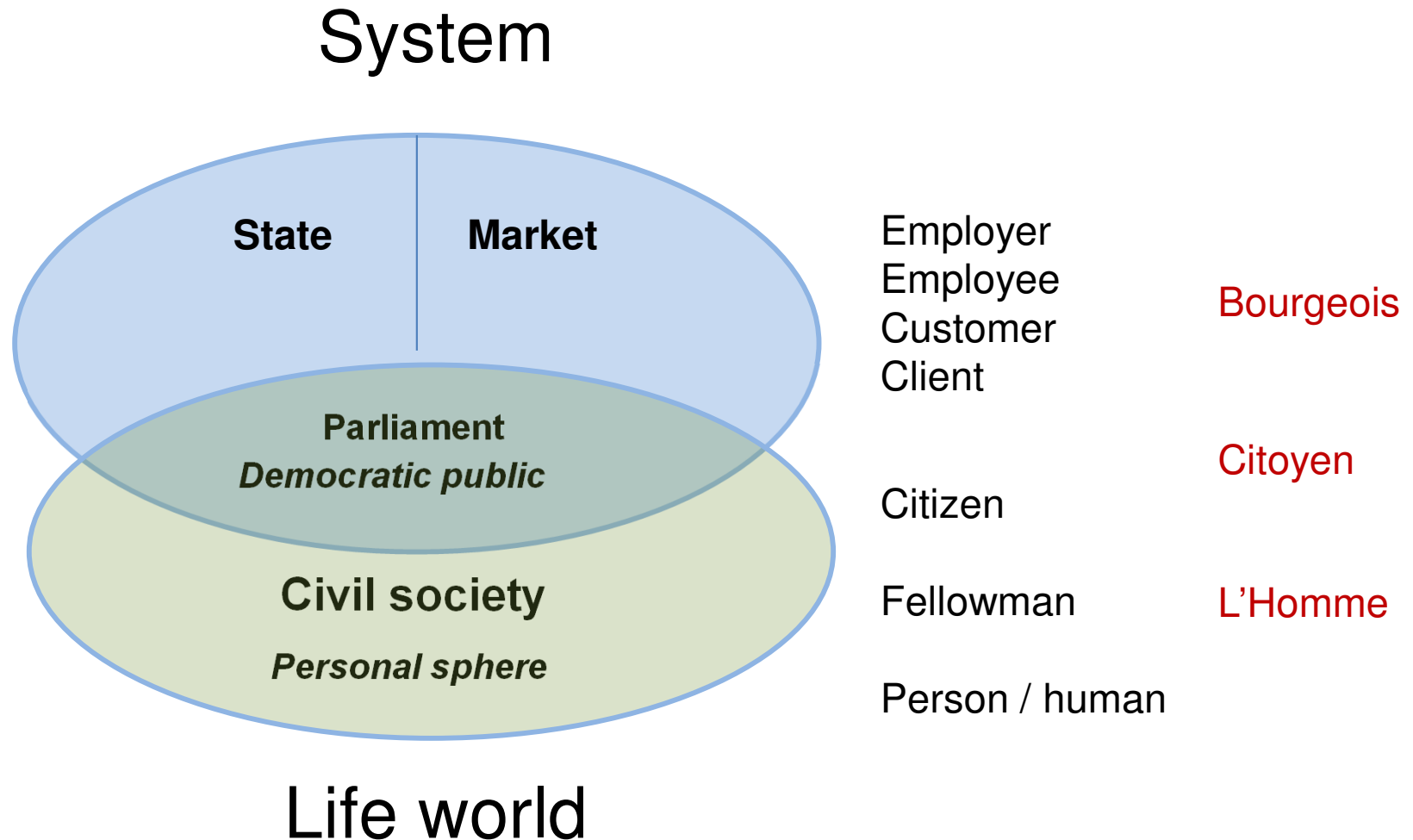


NGOs are communication bridges from the people to the politicians

Free Arts brings expressive and aesthetical rationality to the public sphere.

**Communicative og expressive rationality**  
 (Why - on purpose and meaning)

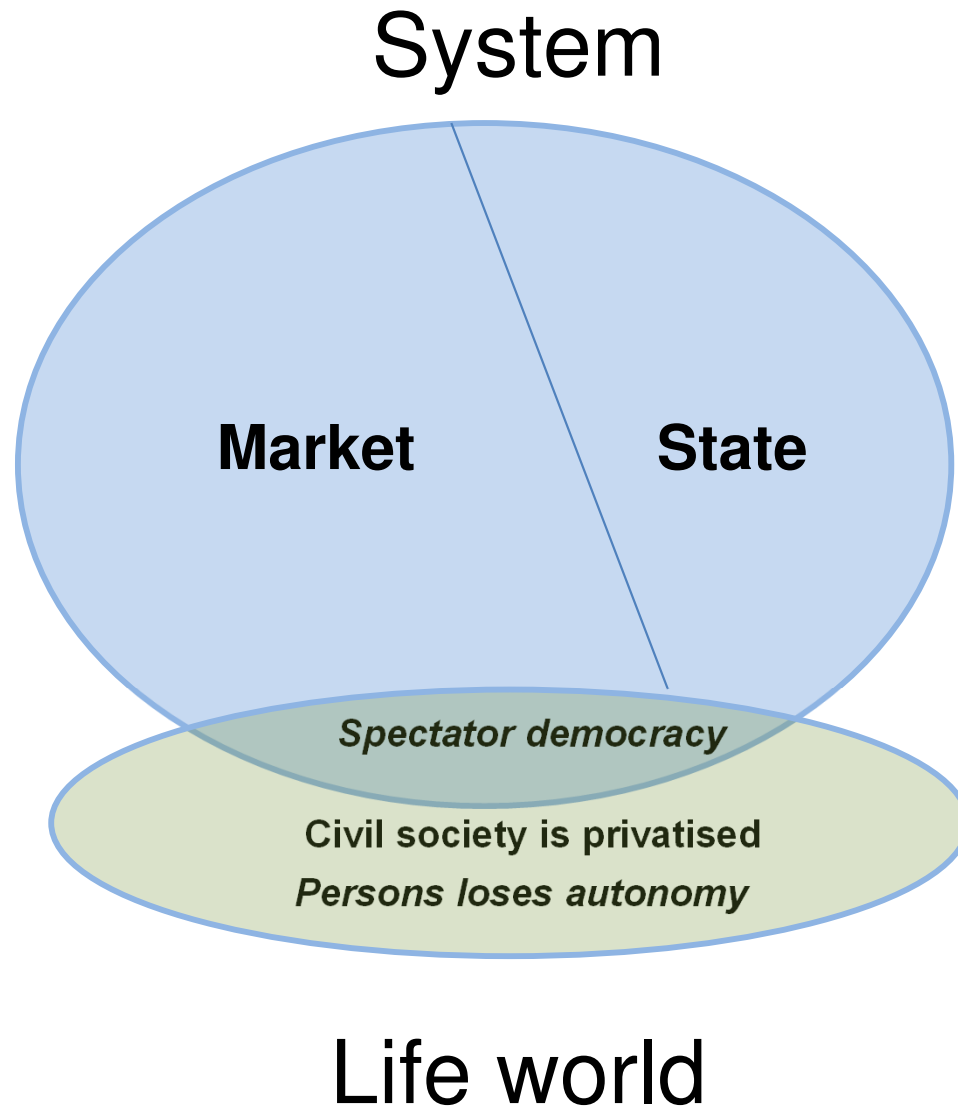
# Habermas – Life spheres and life roles



The good life implies

- A balance between the roles as bourgeois, citoyen and l'homme

# Habermas – The system colonises the life world



## The neoliberal system (or autocratic)

- The competitive state
- New public management
- Commercialization
- Instrumentalisation

## The colonised life world

- Media: Public service to Infotainment
- University: Free thinking to Invoices
- Education: Bildung to competences
- Culture: Art to experience economy
- NGO's: Private volunteering

## Key words:

- One-dimensional society
- Civil society loses learning capacity
- Citizens loses autonomy

*Less "Liberty, equality, fraternity"*

# - Habermas contra Putnam

(communication bridge contra social capital)

Two main views on the roles of the associations in the civil society:

**Habermas** (*Theory of Communicative Action, 1984; Further Reflections on the Public Sphere, 1992*)

- Ensure a deliberative public and democratic participation
- Bridges from the life world to the system – from the people to the politicians
- The activities characterised by communicative rationality (contra instrumental)

**Putnam** (*Making Democracy Work, 1993; Bowling Alone, 2000*)

- Ensure social capital and cultural cohesion - pivotal for a well-functioning society
- Create networks of trust, reciprocity norms and cooperative habits,
- The activities characterized by voluntariness, equality, and none-selfish interests.



The Nordic countries are nearly always in the **top-ten** in all sorts of international comparative surveys, both regarding:

- Soft issues, like degree of happiness, trust, low corruption, community spirit, social and financial equality, etc
- Hard issues, like competitiveness, entrepreneurship, efficiency, workplace cooperation etc.

The opinion-formers and politicians typically tell that a key reason is the extensive and elaborated civil societies in the Nordic region.

But they **do not agree on why**

- some argue like Habermas – and focus on having channels to the people / to listen to the proposals from citizens and civic associations
- others argue like Putnam – and focus on supporting the competence and capacity development of a strong and independent civil society.



## II. Which NGOs are most important - some historical reflections

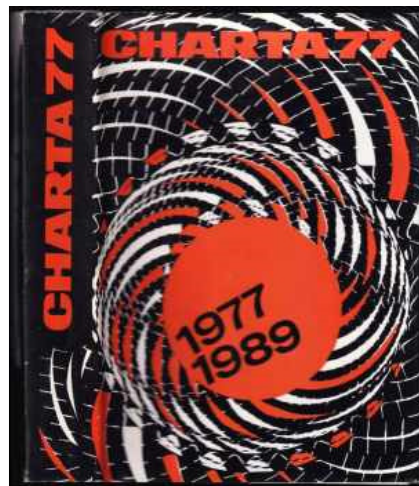
The concept civil society has a long history both in Antique and early modern time.  
Fx Alexis de Tocqueville: Democracy in America, 1835 and 1840.

But during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theoretical and political discourses were dominated by focus on either more state or more marked – either left or right.

It got a revival with the Dissidents and protests in Eastern Europe in the 1980s, like Charta 77 med Havel, Polish Solidarnoz from 1980 med Waleca, and Baltic singing revolution in 1989.

From mid 80s the "civil society" again came on the international political agenda, and it became from early 90s again a central theoretical concept in social sciences.

For many, **genuine NGOs** are system-critical and political activists. Hereby NGOs with few members get more attention than the big “silent” majorities of NGOs that make important differences around in our local communities.



In Denmark approx. 125.000 civil society organisations / CSOs, 2005 \*

## **Area of sport and dance – 25 pct**

- Sport and dance: 25 pct
- Here we have member-based democracy, and volunteering dominate

## **Area of hobby, culture and arts – 30 pct**

- Leisure and hobby: 15 pct; Arts, culture and heritage: 15 pct
- Here we have member-based democracy, and volunteering dominate

## **Area of social, health and education – 15 pct**

- Social: 6 pct; Health: 5 pct; Education: 4 pct and **adult education below 2 pct**
- Only 15 pct of the volunteers were here - most work are done by paid staff
- 60 pct of the self-own institutions are here

## **Area of ideology: Policy, legal, religion, international, **environment**, etc – 10 pct**

- Nearly only member-based associations
- A mix of volunteers and paid staff (Red Cross, Doctors without Borders, Save the Children, etc.)
- Green NGOs **maybe 1-2 pct**

## **Other areas outside normal NGO activities – 20 pct**

- Organisations with relation to work life
- Organisations with relation to housing and local community houses
- Other organisations at the border of the CSO area

\*) A central study of Danish associational life took place in 2003-2005, as part of the large International Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project, where about 50 countries took part.

## All NGOs can provide added community values

The third sector represents a free civic area - where citizens and associations **beyond public control and market pricing** organise myriad of social, cultural, and lifelong activities **with strong added values** for

- Personal development and cultural formation (Bildung),
- Active citizenship and democratic values.
- Social cohesion and mutual trust between different social groups.
- Social inclusion and empowerment of vulnerable groups.
- Local identity and community bonding.
- Green activities like 3R-strategies (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle)



- to summarize and give a perspective

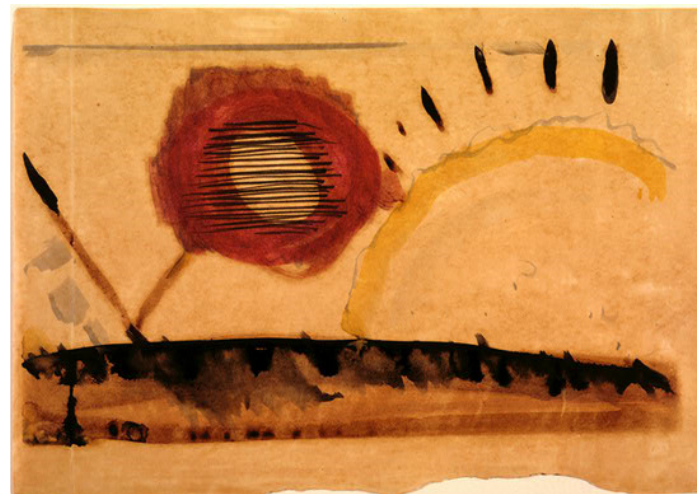
All NGOs are important and share the potential to promote added community values, including to prioritise 3R-strategies (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle)

- And thereby promote a green transition in our societies,

The same potentials can be seen in the whole Baltic Sea Region and the wider European communities.

Here EU, NCM, the national government could be better

- to support the civil societies in their capacity and competence development, including their cross-border contacts.
- to unfold these strong potentials to make societal changes.



Arthur Dove , Distraction, 1928

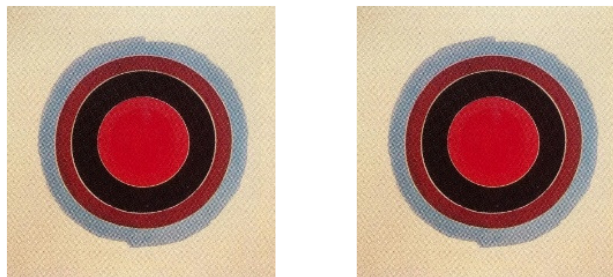
# IV. NGOs' roles in EUs and NCMs strategies, - reference documents

## EU documents:

- [Communication from the Commission - The European Green Deal. COM/2019/640 final](#)
- [Annexes to the Communication - Roadmap - Key actions. COM\(2019\) 640 final](#)
- [The 8<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme \(EAP\) to 2030](#)

## NCM documents:

- [Our Vision 2030. The Nordic Region will become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world. 20.08.2019. By the Nordic prime ministers. Ministers for Co-operation \(MR-SAM\)](#)
- [Action Plan Vision 2030 - for 2021 to 2024. 14.12.20. By The Nordic Council of Ministers](#)
- [Guidelines for involving civil society in work relating to Our Vision 2030. 12.02.21. By Secretary of the Nordic Council of Ministers](#)
- [Our Vision 2030 - the Status report 2023. 06.07.23. By Secretary of the Nordic Council of Ministers](#)



The civil society is nearly not mentioned in the strategy, and it is not mentioned in the action plan.

**The Communication (strategy paper, 2019)** is 24 pages long.

- It mentions in the preamble, page 2, “to put people first” and “A new pact is needed to bring together citizens in all their diversity, with national, regional, local authorities, civil society and industry working closely with the EU’s institutions and consultative bodies.”
- But when it outlines all the **main stakeholders** in the transition, **the civil society nearly disappears**. Many types of private and public stakeholders and political- legal initiative and investment strategies are mentioned, but **actors from the third sector does not exist**.
- Page 19 it talks about actors from the formal education system, like “**Schools, training institutions and universities**” **including upskilling students and the workforce and the SMEs**
- Page 22 – 24 in the final chapter 4, it outlines that “The involvement and commitment of the public and of all stakeholders”. First to provide information to the people, and second the people shall have channels to express their views on the political plans, **and third** “the Commission will **facilitate grassroots initiatives**” – but which in reality only is:
  - “To **improve access to administrative and judicial review at EU level** for citizens and NGOs who have concerns about the legality of decisions with effects on the environment”

The interpretation is confirmed by the Road Map 2021 – 2021, and the indicators in the Action Programme to 2030 – no indicators for civil society:

**Assessment: No initiatives are mentioned to strengthen the own capacities and competences in the civil societies to promote the green transition.**

“**Our Vision 2030** - The Nordic Region will become the **most sustainable and integrated region** in the world” outlines three strategic priorities.

The **Action Plan for 2021 to 2024 present 12 objectives the vision:**

- A green Nordic Region with 5 objectives, where **objectives 4** has as a sub-point education that may include liberal adult education and NGOs
- A competitive Nordic Region with 3 objectives without any reference to civil society
- A socially sustainable Nordic Region with 4 objectives, where the **11th objectives** will “give Nordic civil society, and especially children and young people, a louder voice and greater participation in Nordic cooperation”

**The Guidelines for involving civil society in Our Vision 2030** include two points:

- Establish Nordic civil society network, CIV - **to advice NCM**
- Provide public consultations channels – **consultation rights**

**The Status report 2023** has **no indicators** regarding to the role of the civil society and NGOs, neither what they can do for the green transition nor what NCM can do to strengthen their contribution to this change.

**Assessment: The civil society is mentioned in the Vision and the action plans, but only with a limited Habermas understanding and no indicators are mentioned in the Status Report 2023.**

Maybe better steps in New action plan for 2025 – 20230 – but key words is to support thematic NGO-networks that can **give quality advice to the political level and contribute to shaping public opinion and influencing.**

A third political forum is the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference – see <https://www.bspc.net/>

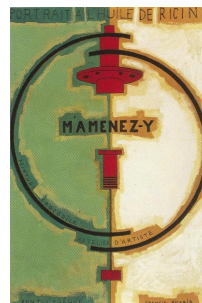
*“Since 1991 the platform for cooperation, commitment and competence in political dialogue of parliaments, governments and civil society in the Baltic Sea Region.”*

The 33rd Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference took place in Helsingør, 25<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> August 2024. Here again published a Conference Resolution – in all 8 pages with 49 objectives:

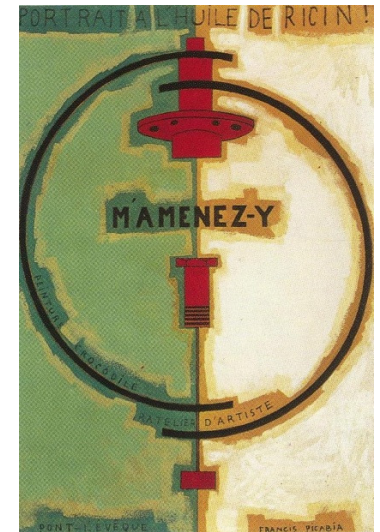
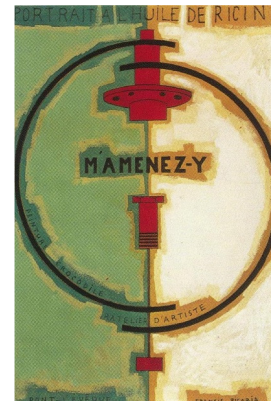
Objective 3: “Empower Citizen Engagement” intends to “facilitate citizen participation in political decision-making” and “improve education of young people about democracy”.

Again – no proposals to strengthening the own capacities in the civil society to make a stronger impact for the green transition. The limited role of the NGOs is to have some access to send political proposal to the parliamentarians in BSPC which may qualify the final proposals.

It means as a stakeholder to have a sort of right of consultation.



Picabia,  
M`Amenez-y, 1919



**To summarise: The three political forums: EU, NCM and BSPC mainly see the civil society as having a potential to qualify the legislation - by using elaborated hearing rights and having favourable contacts bridges to the political decision-makers.**

This understanding and approach to civil society is in a strange contradiction to the festive speeches about the importance of having strong independent civil societies that can contribute to the overall development of our societies.



Munch-Petersen, Red Butterfly, 1935

We need several associations in the region and new Baltic NGO-networks that can:

- Argue for the need of support that can promote capacity development on at Baltic Sea level, for example:
  - To exchange experiences and knowhow and good practice examples at onsite and online cross-border seminars, symposia and conferences in the Baltic Sea region.
  - To have possibilities for further education and training courses for NGOs – both as distance learning, webinars and real onsite courses.
  - To have continued research about NGO – activities at the Baltic Sea level, with a publishing house and a Baltic NGO magazine.
  - To renew the idea of a Nordic Peoples Academy.



Georgia O'Keeffe: Evening star iv, 1917

**Thank you for the attention!**

