

The theme of the 388th Dies Natalis is the future of democracy. I have been nominated for an honorary doctorate under Utrecht University's strategic theme Pathways to Sustainability. As it happens, these two themes come together in my research on the relationship between democracy and sustainability. This research has grappled with two superficially contradictory insights.

The first is that democratic states tend, on average, to do a better job in protecting their environments than autocratic states. This is because they allow a free flow of environmental information, the exposure of problems, and the calling to account of decision makers. Thanks to their guarantee of civil and political rights and free elections, liberal democracies force governments to be responsive to their citizens.

The second is that historical record thus far has created a growing worry that liberal democratic states may not be institutionally capable or agile enough to address the intersecting ecological and climate crises on a planetary scale.

The most common lament is that the limited temporal horizons of electoral cycles in liberal democracies are too short, which make it difficult to enact durable sustainability policies for the long term.

However, my research has sought to highlight a broader problem: that the institutions of liberal democracy oblige elected representatives to answer only to their electorate and nation. They are not required to answer to wider communities in space and time for the harmful inter-generational and transboundary ecological consequences of their political decisions, even when serious and irreversible ecological harm can be clearly foreseen.

My research has tracked the growing environmental demands on the state, from above and below, and worked with the grain of these developments to articulate an account of ecologically democracy and the green state. This account includes new ecological norms, rights, procedures and practices that would make existing liberal democratic states more institutionally predisposed towards serving a wider set of socio-ecological communities through space and time. These changes extend the boundaries of the moral and political community and loosen, if not dislodge, the traditional nexus between sovereignty, territoriality, citizenship and democracy.

I am delighted and humbled to receive this honorary doctorate. I wish to thank the Rector of Utrecht University, Henk Kummeling, for his invitation and warm hospitality. I also wish to thank 'my honorary supervisors', Professor Liesbeth

van de Grift and Professor Frank Biermann, both of whom have made significant contributions to research on sustainability. This is a very special honour, given Utrecht University's research strengths in sustainability. I look forward to building deeper connections with this vibrant research community.