Agonos: A Competitive, Community-Controlled Framework for Merit-Based Governance in Digital Systems *by*

Connor Frederiksen — March 28th, 2026

Abstract

This paper introduces **cybercivic infrastructure**: a class of digital systems designed to perform civic functions (governance, legitimacy formation, authority allocation, and collective decision-making) within cyberspace itself, rather than merely facilitating communication or social interaction.

Digital platforms increasingly function as de facto civic institutions, yet their governance structures remain overwhelmingly centralized, opaque, and susceptible to capture by capital, scale, and incumbent power. Despite exercising civic power, these platforms lack the structural characteristics of true civic systems. This gap motivates the need for what this paper defines as *cybercivic infrastructure*. Existing systems tend to reward visibility, popularity, or financial leverage rather than demonstrated competence, resulting in distorted hierarchies of authority and diminished public trust. This paper introduces **Agonos**, a competitive, community-controlled digital framework designed to address these structural failures through merit-based evaluation, decentralized governance, and community control.

Agonos is grounded in the concept of **agon**—constructive competition—as a foundational governance primitive. Rather than treating competition as entertainment or engagement optimization, the system operationalizes it as a method for determining legitimacy, expertise, and decision-making authority. Human activity is organized into three primary competitive domains: *verbal, physical,* and *virtual*, each with domain-appropriate evaluative standards. This architecture enables the systematic identification of excellence while preventing dominance by volume, popularity, or algorithmic amplification.

Technologically, the platform is supported by a centralized, identity-linked achievement data distribution system that aggregates and transparently disseminates performance metrics across competitive contexts. This infrastructure ensures informational symmetry, portability of reputation, and consistent evaluation criteria, forming a durable substrate for merit-based comparison and governance.

Governance within Agonos is conducted through structured competitive processes rather than conventional voting or hierarchical control. Community decisions emerge from contested evaluation, while external institutions seeking influence must pass through internally legitimized mechanisms.

Taken together, Agonos proposes a model for digital systems in which authority is earned rather than purchased, governance is endogenous rather than imposed, and communities are insulated from external power through structural design. The framework represents a potential alternative to centralized digital

governance, positioning competition, transparency, and community control as core principles of a durable digital civic infrastructure.

2. Problem Statement: Structural Failures of Centralized Digital Governance

Digital platforms have evolved beyond their original roles as communication tools and now function as quasi-civic institutions. They shape public discourse, determine reputational standing, influence economic opportunity, and mediate access to information at global scale. Despite this expanded role, the governance models underpinning most contemporary platforms remain structurally misaligned with these responsibilities. Authority is concentrated, decision-making processes are opaque, and mechanisms for accountability are limited or nonexistent.

A primary failure of existing platforms is the **centralization of power**. Governance authority is typically retained by corporate entities whose incentives are driven by capital efficiency, growth metrics, and shareholder returns rather than by the epistemic quality or social legitimacy of outcomes. Users, while generating the majority of value within these systems, possess little to no meaningful influence over platform rules, norms, or long-term direction. This asymmetry produces environments in which policy decisions can be unilaterally imposed, altered, or revoked without democratic legitimacy or procedural transparency.

Closely related is the problem of **authority distortion through algorithmic amplification**. Influence within dominant platforms is frequently determined by engagement-driven metrics such as visibility, virality, or network effects. These metrics favor volume, repetition, and emotional salience over rigor, competence, or demonstrated expertise. As a result, the loudest or most sensational voices often dominate discourse, while more knowledgeable or capable contributors are systematically deprioritized. This dynamic erodes trust, degrades informational quality, and incentivizes performative behavior rather than substantive contribution.

A third failure mode is **power capture through capital and incumbency**. Financial resources, advertising spend, and institutional partnerships can be leveraged to secure disproportionate influence within platform ecosystems. This enables external actors—corporations, political entities, or consolidated interest groups—to shape narratives, rankings, and governance outcomes without undergoing meaningful evaluation by the communities they affect. Over time, such capture transforms platforms into extensions of existing power structures rather than neutral arenas for competition, deliberation, or discovery.

Finally, current systems lack durable mechanisms for **self-governance and institutional insulation**. Users are typically dependent on platform operators to arbitrate disputes, define rules, and enforce norms. There is no structural requirement for external power to justify itself within the community it seeks to

influence. Consequently, users remain perpetually exposed to shifting policies, ideological pressure, and economic manipulation originating outside their control.

Taken together, these failures indicate that the problem is not merely one of implementation, moderation, or policy refinement, but of **foundational design**. Centralized digital platforms are structurally incapable of producing legitimate, merit-based governance at scale because they conflate authority with ownership, influence with visibility, and legitimacy with capital. Addressing these deficiencies requires a fundamentally different approach—one that treats competition, evaluation, and governance as core system primitives rather than secondary features.

3. Philosophical Framework: *Agon* as a Governance Primitive

The term *agon* originates in classical Greek thought, denoting structured contestation as a means of testing excellence, legitimacy, and virtue. Historically, agonistic processes were not confined to athletic competition but extended to rhetoric, philosophy, law, and civic life. Within these contexts, competition functioned as an epistemic mechanism: a structured method through which superior arguments, skills, or performances could be identified through comparative evaluation. This paper adopts *agon* not as a cultural motif, but as a **governance primitive**—a foundational mechanism upon which authority and decision-making can be systematically derived.

Contemporary digital governance models largely rely on two mechanisms for legitimacy: hierarchical authority and majority aggregation. Hierarchical systems concentrate decision-making power in centralized entities, while majority-based systems equate legitimacy with numerical dominance. Both approaches exhibit structural weaknesses. Hierarchies are prone to capture and opacity, while majority aggregation frequently conflates popularity with correctness and can marginalize expertise. In contrast, an agonistic framework treats legitimacy as **earned through performance under contest**, rather than inherited through position or accumulated through volume.

Within an agon-based system, authority is conditional and contextual. Individuals or proposals gain standing not through identity, financial leverage, or rhetorical reach, but through demonstrable success within defined evaluative environments. This model reframes governance as an ongoing process of competitive validation, in which claims to authority must be continuously substantiated. As a result, power remains dynamic, revocable, and responsive to evidence, rather than static or entrenched.

Crucially, *agon* enables the separation of **evaluation** from **amplification**. Whereas contemporary platforms amplify content based on engagement metrics that reward emotional intensity or repetition, an agonistic system privileges structured comparison under shared rules. Outcomes are determined by relative performance against explicit criteria rather than by attention accumulation. This distinction is essential for preserving epistemic integrity and preventing the dominance of the loudest or most persistent actors.

Finally, treating agon as a governance primitive allows competition to function as a **filter rather than a spectacle**. Competitive processes are not designed to maximize participation or entertainment value, but to produce legitimate outcomes that can be trusted by the community. When embedded at the structural level, agonistic evaluation becomes a means of distributing authority, resolving disputes, and guiding collective decision-making without reliance on centralized enforcement or external validation.

4. Competitive Domain Architecture

Revision note (Jan 11, 2026): Sections 4.2 and 4.3 are explicitly scoped as capability-assessment domains (qualification/readiness), not primary sources of generalized governance authority.

For an agonistic governance system to function at scale, competition must be structured in a manner that is both comprehensive and domain-appropriate. Human excellence does not manifest uniformly across all activities; rather, it emerges within distinct modalities that require different evaluative standards. Agonos therefore organizes competitive activity into three primary domains: **verbal**, **physical**, and **virtual**. These domains are abstractions that capture the majority of human performance while remaining sufficiently general to accommodate future forms of activity.

The purpose of this domain architecture is twofold. First, it prevents the collapse of heterogeneous forms of excellence into a single evaluative metric, a common failure of generalized reputation systems. Second, it ensures that authority and recognition arise from performance within the appropriate contextual framework, rather than from cross-domain popularity or accumulated visibility.

4.1 Verbal Competition

Verbal competition constitutes the primary epistemic foundation of governance within the Agonos framework. It encompasses domains in which reasoning, articulation, persuasion, and conceptual clarity determine legitimacy, authority, and decision-making capacity. Unlike physical and virtual competition, verbal agon directly informs collective judgment regarding values, priorities, and courses of action.

The platform is explicitly designed to support structured verbal competition across several high-impact domains in which discourse traditionally shapes institutional and societal outcomes:

Political Debate. Verbal competition provides a mechanism for evaluating policy proposals, ideological claims, and governance frameworks based on coherence, feasibility, internal consistency, and responsiveness to critique. By structuring political debate as contestation rather than amplification, the platform mitigates populist distortion and rewards substantiated argument over rhetorical volume.

Academic Debate. In academic contexts, verbal agon enables the comparative evaluation of theories, methodologies, and interpretations. Claims gain standing through evidentiary support, logical rigor, and successful engagement with counterarguments, reinforcing standards of intellectual accountability that are often weakened by publication incentives or institutional inertia.

Legal Debate. Legal reasoning relies fundamentally on adversarial argumentation. Within the platform, verbal competition mirrors this structure by allowing interpretations of law, precedent, and principle to be tested through formal contest. Authority emerges from analytical precision and procedural reasoning rather than professional title alone.

Philosophical Debate. Philosophical inquiry depends on sustained engagement with first principles, assumptions, and conceptual boundaries. Verbal competition within this domain emphasizes clarity, internal coherence, and the ability to withstand rigorous critique, allowing philosophical authority to emerge from depth of reasoning rather than rhetorical flourish.

Religious Debate. Religious and theological discourse often involves competing truth claims, moral frameworks, and interpretive traditions. Structured verbal competition enables these claims to be articulated, examined, and challenged without defaulting to coercion or institutional dominance, preserving both pluralism and intellectual seriousness.

Ethical Debate. Ethical decision-making requires balancing values, consequences, and duties under conditions of uncertainty. Verbal agon allows ethical frameworks to be evaluated comparatively, testing their applicability across scenarios and their resilience under moral pressure.

Across all verbal domains, evaluation criteria emphasize logical validity, evidentiary grounding, conceptual consistency, and responsiveness to opposing arguments. Authority within verbal competition is provisional and revocable, contingent on continued performance rather than static status. By anchoring governance authority in structured verbal agon, Agonos ensures that collective decisions are guided by the strongest available reasoning rather than popularity, identity, or external power.

4.2 Physical Competition

Physical competition occupies a distinct and deliberately limited role within the Agonos framework. Unlike verbal or virtual competition, physical performance does not function as a primary source of governance authority. Instead, it serves as an empirical domain that constrains decision-making by grounding certain claims in biological and material reality.

This domain encompasses activities in which embodied capability—such as strength, endurance, coordination, resilience, and stress tolerance—is directly relevant to outcomes. Its primary function within the platform is not normative deliberation, but **capability verification**. Physical competition enables the accurate measurement and comparison of human performance in contexts where physical competence is essential for safety, effectiveness, or survival.

Accordingly, the physical domain plays a critical role in areas such as military readiness, emergency response, law enforcement, firefighting, and physically demanding labor. In these contexts, abstract principles of equality or representation cannot substitute for demonstrable ability. Physical competition provides a transparent mechanism for identifying individuals who are objectively qualified to perform dangerous or demanding tasks, thereby reducing risk to both practitioners and the communities they serve.

Within governance contexts, physical competition contributes perspective rather than authority. It informs deliberation by revealing the practical limits of human performance, including statistically significant differences across populations, without prescribing political outcomes. In this way, it acts as a corrective to policy frameworks that ignore or obscure material constraints, while remaining subordinate to deliberative and evaluative processes conducted within the verbal domain.

By isolating physical competition to its appropriate epistemic role, the platform avoids conflating bodily capability with moral or political legitimacy. At the same time, it preserves the capacity to surface uncomfortable but necessary truths about performance, risk, and qualification—truths that are essential for responsible governance in domains where physical reality cannot be negotiated.

4.3 Virtual Competition

Virtual competition encompasses activities conducted within digital or simulated environments, including strategy games, training simulations, esports, flight simulation, driving simulation, and other input-dominant systems. Within the Agonos framework, virtual competition functions as a high-resolution capability assessment domain rather than a primary source of governance authority.

The defining characteristic of virtual environments is their capacity for **dense measurement**. Unlike verbal or physical competition, digital systems can record granular performance data across a wide range of variables, including reaction time, decision sequencing, risk tolerance, adaptability, coordination, and error recovery. This enables the identification of nuanced skill profiles that are otherwise difficult or impossible to observe in real-world settings.

In governance-related contexts, virtual competition serves as a proving ground for competence in roles that involve complex decision-making under pressure. For example, strategic simulations can be used to evaluate leadership performance in high-stakes, resource-constrained scenarios prior to the assignment of real authority. Similarly, drone operators, pilots, and other specialists can demonstrate proficiency in simulated environments before operating in conditions where errors carry irreversible consequences.

As with physical competition, the authority derived from virtual performance is **task-specific and conditional**. Excellence in a simulated environment does not confer generalized political legitimacy or moral authority. Instead, it provides empirical evidence of readiness, allowing communities and institutions to assign responsibility based on demonstrated capability rather than credentials, seniority, or self-assertion.

The virtual domain thus plays a critical supporting role within the broader governance system. It enables precision recruitment, targeted team formation, and risk mitigation by matching individuals with roles that align with their demonstrated strengths. While this approach is particularly evident in military training and recruitment, it is equally applicable to civilian domains that demand high performance under specialized conditions.

By situating virtual competition as a capability amplifier rather than a governing authority, Agonos leverages the strengths of digital measurement without succumbing to technocratic determinism. The

result is a system in which data informs judgment, simulations precede responsibility, and authority remains grounded in deliberative legitimacy rather than algorithmic output.

4.4 Cross-Domain Isolation and Integrity

A defining feature of the architecture is cross-domain isolation. Success in one domain does not automatically confer authority in another. This preserves domain integrity while allowing achievements to be recorded and contextualized within a shared framework. The result is a system in which excellence is legible without becoming distortive.

5. Technical Architecture: Centralized Achievement Data Distribution

For an agonistic governance framework to operate reliably at scale, evaluative outcomes must be recorded, preserved, and made legible without introducing centralized control over authority. Agonos addresses this requirement through a centralized achievement data distribution architecture that separates **data integrity** from **decision authority**. The system is designed to ensure that competitive outcomes are consistently represented across contexts while preventing any single actor from unilaterally defining legitimacy.

At its core, the architecture maintains an identity-linked achievement profile for each participant. This profile functions as a canonical record of competitive performance across verbal, physical, and virtual domains. Achievements are recorded as structured data objects containing domain classification, contextual metadata, evaluation criteria, and outcome states. By standardizing achievement representation, the platform enables cross-context comparison without collapsing domain-specific standards.

Centralization within this architecture refers to **data coherence**, not power concentration. While achievement records are stored and indexed through a unified system to prevent fragmentation or manipulation, interpretive authority remains distributed. No centralized entity determines the meaning or weight of an achievement outside the evaluative processes that produced it. Instead, achievements serve as persistent signals that can be referenced, challenged, or superseded through subsequent competition.

The distribution layer ensures that achievement data is portable and transparent. Participants can present their performance history across debates, simulations, or trials without reliance on third-party credentialing bodies. This portability reduces informational asymmetry, allowing communities to assess claims of competence directly rather than deferring to institutional reputation or credential inflation.

Crucially, the architecture is designed to support **revocability and temporal relevance**. Achievements are not treated as permanent entitlements but as time-bound indicators of demonstrated capability. As new competitions occur, prior achievements may be reinforced, contextualized, or rendered obsolete. This temporal structure prevents the ossification of authority and aligns long-term legitimacy with continued performance.

By combining centralized data integrity with decentralized evaluative authority, the technical architecture of Agonos provides the infrastructure necessary for merit-based governance without recreating the failure modes of centralized platforms. The system enables transparency, accountability, and continuity while preserving the agonistic principle that authority must be earned, maintained, and, when necessary, re-earned through contestation.

6. Governance as an Open, Self-Optimizing Design Space

Governance within Agonos is intentionally treated as an **open design space** rather than a fixed or finalized mechanism. This reflects the recognition that no static governance model can remain optimal across changing social, technological, and institutional conditions. Instead of embedding immutable rules, the platform establishes governance as a continuously contestable system subject to improvement through structured competitive processes.

Proposals for governance modification, refinement, or replacement are themselves subject to agonistic evaluation. Competitive debate functions as the primary mechanism through which governance ideas are introduced, challenged, and stress-tested. In this way, self-governance becomes recursive: the same competitive principles used to evaluate participants and decisions are applied to the governance system itself.

This approach enables **self-optimization** within a technological environment. As users identify inefficiencies, vulnerabilities, or unintended consequences, they may propose improvements that must withstand rigorous contestation before adoption. Governance therefore evolves not through unilateral intervention or external pressure, but through internally legitimized processes grounded in demonstrated reasoning and performance.

By treating governance as adaptive rather than finalized, Agonos avoids premature institutional lock-in while preserving legitimacy. Authority over the system's evolution remains distributed, revocable, and evidence-driven, ensuring that governance structures can improve over time without surrendering control to centralized actors or ideological capture.

7. Executive Authority as a Deferred Design Problem

The unresolved questions surrounding executive authority, term limits, scope of power, and removal mechanisms underscore a central premise of the Agonos framework: **founder stewardship during the platform's formative years is not merely practical, but structurally necessary**.

Agonos represents a novel approach to large-scale digital self-governance, one for which no fully proven executive model yet exists. Attempting to prematurely encode executive authority into immutable rules would risk hardening untested assumptions and importing governance failures from legacy institutions ill-suited to this context. Accordingly, executive design is treated as a deferred problem—one that must be informed by lived operational experience rather than abstract theorizing alone.

During the formative phase, the founder functions as a unifying executive authority responsible for integrating philosophical principles, technical infrastructure, and emergent community dynamics into a coherent and stable system. This role is not justified by identity or ownership alone, but by proximity to system design, accumulated contextual knowledge, and accountability for long-term outcomes. Founder authority in this phase is exercised as *institutional authorship*: the responsibility to shape executive constraints in response to real-world stressors, adversarial behavior, and scaling challenges.

As Agonos matures, empirical evidence gathered through platform operation, competitive governance experiments, and community feedback will inform the gradual specification of executive authority models. These may include mechanisms for CEO selection, term duration, scope limitation, performance evaluation, and impeachment. Crucially, such mechanisms are intended to emerge only once the system's failure modes are sufficiently understood to design against them.

By deferring final executive governance design, Agonos avoids the premature decentralization trap in which authority is distributed before it can be responsibly constrained. Founder stewardship thus serves as a bridge between conception and institutional maturity, ensuring that when executive power is ultimately transferred to community control, it is accompanied by guardrails forged through experience rather than ideology.

In this sense, founder control during the early stages is not a contradiction of community control, but a prerequisite for its eventual success.

8. Limitations, Risks, and Open Challenges

No governance framework of this scope can be considered complete without a candid assessment of its limitations and failure modes. Agonos is designed to address structural deficiencies in centralized digital governance, but it is not immune to risk. Identifying these risks explicitly is necessary both for intellectual honesty and for guiding future system hardening.

Adversarial Power and Coercion. As a system that redistributes authority away from entrenched centers of power, Agonos may attract adversarial attention from technological, political, or geopolitical actors. This risk arises specifically because a self-governing cybercivic system naturally interferes with existing power structures by reducing their ability to mediate, extract, or control civic outcomes. Such interference creates incentives for resistance, suppression, or disruption.

Adversarial threats may extend beyond conventional cyberattacks to include illegal or extralegal tactics such as sabotage, theft, blackmail, coercion, or targeted threats against key individuals and their families. While technical safeguards can mitigate certain attack vectors, many of these risks originate from broader political and geopolitical dynamics. Addressing them requires layered security, decentralization of critical

dependencies, rapid iteration during formative stages, and long-term institutional resilience rather than purely technical solutions.

Infiltration and Subversion. Adversarial actors may attempt to undermine the system from within by coordinating influence campaigns, exploiting governance mechanisms, or gradually shaping norms in ways that erode merit-based evaluation. While the agonistic framework is designed to resist such capture by requiring performance and contestation, no system can fully eliminate the risk of sustained, coordinated subversion. Continuous monitoring, adaptive governance constraints, and competitive stress-testing of the system itself remain necessary.

Executive Continuity and Leadership Ambiguity. Until executive authority models are fully specified and validated through operational experience, ambiguity may exist regarding leadership expectations after the founding stewards step aside. While this ambiguity is intentional during the formative phase, it introduces transitional risk if leadership succession mechanisms are not sufficiently mature at the time of transfer.

External Platform Dependence and Interoperability. The effectiveness of Agonos may be constrained by limited cooperation from external platforms, institutions, or data providers. Resistance to interoperability, restricted data access, or active obstruction by incumbent systems could slow adoption or reduce the completeness of achievement records, particularly during early stages.

Measurement Limitations in Physical Competition. Although physical competition plays a constrained role within the framework, its effectiveness depends on reliable measurement. Current hardware and data collection tools for physical performance are limited in resolution and accessibility, particularly outside professional or institutional contexts. While technological progress is expected to expand these capabilities over time, uneven measurement fidelity may persist in the near term.

Decision-Making Saturation. A system that enables broad participation in governance risks becoming overly saturated with deliberation, leading to slow or fragmented decision-making. Without appropriate filtering, prioritization, or delegation mechanisms, excessive democratic activity may impair responsiveness. Balancing inclusivity with operational efficiency remains an ongoing design challenge.

Early-Stage Status Suppression. Merit-based systems can inadvertently disadvantage new or younger participants whose ideas are sound but whose competitive standing is initially low. If not carefully designed, ranking mechanisms may suppress valuable contributions before individuals have the opportunity to demonstrate competence. Addressing this risk requires mechanisms that allow ideas to be evaluated on their merits independently of the proposer's current status.

These limitations do not invalidate the Agonos framework, but they do delineate the boundaries within which it must evolve. Many of these risks are themselves subject to competitive analysis and iterative mitigation through the system's self-optimizing governance processes. During the platform's early years, founder stewardship plays an additional critical role in this context: centralized authority enables rapid iteration, decisive intervention, and continuous refinement in response to emergent threats, design flaws, and unanticipated failure modes. This capacity to move quickly is essential while institutional knowledge is still being accumulated and governance mechanisms are still maturing. Explicit recognition of these

challenges, and of the need for early-stage decisiveness, is essential to ensuring that Agonos develops as a resilient institution rather than a brittle ideal.

9. Cybercivics as an Emerging Field of Study

The introduction of cybercivic infrastructure implies the emergence of a corresponding field of inquiry: **cybercivics**. Cybercivics is proposed as an interdisciplinary domain concerned with the design, evaluation, and evolution of civic systems that operate natively within cyberspace. Where traditional civics examines governance within nation-states and physical institutions, cybercivics addresses legitimacy, authority, participation, and power in digital environments that are transnational, non-coercive, and software-mediated.

Cybercivics draws from, but is not reducible to, existing disciplines. It intersects political theory, constitutional design, systems engineering, security, economics, ethics, and human–computer interaction, while introducing problems that none of these fields can solve in isolation. Core questions include how legitimacy is generated without physical enforcement, how authority is earned and revoked in merit-based systems, how governance resists capture under adversarial pressure, and how civic participation scales without collapsing into noise or centralization.

Within this framework, platforms such as Agonos are not treated merely as products or services, but as **experimental civic institutions**. Their architectures, governance mechanisms, and failure modes become objects of study rather than implementation details. Competitive governance experiments, adaptive rule formation, and community-led institutional evolution serve as empirical inputs for theory-building within the field.

The maturation of cybercivics will require new analytical tools, shared terminology, and comparative frameworks capable of evaluating cybercivic systems across contexts. Over time, this field may inform standards, best practices, and educational curricula, shaping how future generations design and govern digital civic spaces.

By explicitly naming cybercivics as a field of study, this paper positions cybercivic infrastructure not as an isolated innovation, but as the foundation for a broader intellectual and institutional project—one that seeks to understand how civic life itself must evolve when its primary arenas are digital, global, and adversarial.

Conclusion

Agonos is proposed not as a finished governance solution, but as a durable framework for discovering better ones. It responds to the structural failures of centralized digital platforms by re-centering legitimacy around contestable merit, transparent evaluation, and community control, while acknowledging that no static institutional design can remain optimal over time.

By treating *agon*—structured competition—as a governance primitive, the platform establishes a system in which authority is earned, contextual, and revocable. Verbal competition grounds collective judgment

and decision-making; physical and virtual competition provide empirical constraints and capability assessment without overreaching into moral or political authority. Together, these domains create an evaluative architecture capable of scaling human excellence without collapsing into popularity, capital dominance, or force.

The technical infrastructure of centralized achievement data distribution ensures continuity, transparency, and accountability without reintroducing centralized power. Governance itself is treated as an open, self-optimizing design space, allowing the system to adapt as its failure modes are revealed. Founder stewardship during the formative years provides the speed, coherence, and experiential learning required to harden these mechanisms before authority and control are fully transferred to the community.

Ultimately, Agonos advances a model of digital self-governance that neither denies power nor concentrates it permanently. Instead, it constrains power through structure, subjects it to contestation, and aligns it with demonstrated competence and collective consent. If successful, the framework offers not a utopia, but a resilient civic substrate—one capable of evolving alongside the people it serves, long after its founders have stepped aside.