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Democratic Engagement through Theatre

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Creating Democracy



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How to vote

Everyone has one vote

Everyone can come up with proposals

The majority decides

If the vote comes within 60-40 we initiate a referendum

We continue to keep the conversation open

In any vote we must listen to the minority

If there is a minority, they have the right to propose

Everyone has the chance to speak or propose

The purpose and

Freedom and

How to change

I.

[The audience is invited to the performance and seated in a circle in the theatre space. The actors introduce themselves]

Research shows that democracy is under threat. Large parts of the world and countries have gone from being democracies to becoming more authoritarian. You are probably aware of this. Examples are Brazil, Syria, Thailand, Serbia, Venezuela and Hungary. Certain democratic rights no longer exist in these countries. Even fundamental rights and freedoms, such as freedom of speech or the right to demonstrate, have been limited. It has not happened through outright coups where military forces have been taking over these countries by force. Instead, it is the combination of strong leaders and citizens who have started to doubt democracy. As a result, these states are beginning to waver from being democracies to becoming more authoritarian.

This performance is called *Creating Democracy*. That is what we will do here together for ninety minutes. We are going to create a democracy by working together. And we will do this by discussing the content and fundamentals of democracy and then voting on them.

The first democracy was born in ancient Greece 2500 years ago. In Greek democracy, the citizens gathered at a place not far from the Acropolis and the Parthenon temple. There was a raised ledge and below a lawn where a few thousand citizens could be accommodated. There, they gathered about forty times a year to debate how the city should be governed and then voted by a show of hands. And what they decided through this vote became law.

Modern liberal democracies have a constitution that defines them. A constitution is a set of rules that specify the democracy. Four different aspects are decided in most constitutions. First, it determines the purpose and aim of democracy. These goals are often abstract political ideals on what democracy aims for, for example, that all power should come from the people. Second, the constitution stipulates the freedom and rights of the citizens, such as freedom of religion, freedom of speech,

and freedom of the press. All these areas are to be understood as outside politics. Third, it regulates the electoral rules that decide the distribution of power: how and when are the elections arranged? Who can vote in elections? How are the elections organised? Finally, it dictates how and when to change the Constitution.

Here is the ‘Swedish Instrument of Government’ as an example:

All public power in Sweden proceeds from the people. Swedish democracy is founded on the free formation of opinion and on universal and equal suffrage. It is realised through a representative and parliamentary form of government and through local self-government. Public power is exercised under the law. Public power shall be exercised with respect for the equal worth of all and the liberty and dignity of the individual. It shall be fundamental aims of public activity. In particular, the public institutions shall secure the right to employment, housing, and education, and shall promote social care and social security, as well as favourable conditions for good health. The public institutions shall promote sustainable development leading to a good environment for present and future generations. The public institutions shall promote the ideals of democracy as guidelines in all sectors of society and shall protect the private and family lives of the individual. The public institutions shall work to promote the opportunity for all to attain participation and equality in society, and for the rights of the child to be safeguarded. The public institutions shall combat discrimination of persons on grounds of gender, colour, national or ethnic origin, linguistic or religious affiliation, functional disability, sexual orientation, age, or other circumstance affecting the individual. The opportunities of the Sami people, and ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities to preserve and develop a cultural and social life of their own shall be promoted. (Sveriges Riksdag, 2022)

What we are going to do in this performance is to create a democracy by making a constitution and defining these different aspects.

Purpose and aim
Freedom and rights
Electoral rules
How to change the constitution

We will do that by having a conversation about the content and the fundamentals of democracy and then voting on them. In other words, you will participate in a dialogue with us. First, however, we must vote to see if you want to participate. Who wants to take part in this? Raise your hands!

[The audience votes if they want to participate or not.]

We need a principle for how we make decisions. I propose that we start with the following rules:

Everyone has the right to come up with proposals
Everyone has one vote
The majority decides.

Could we all agree on that? Raise your hand.

[The audience votes if they agree to the rules.]

So, what will be essential for our new democracy? Suggestions?

[The actors gather proposals for ten minutes. After this, they start problematising the proposals in the next ten minutes. It is vital to have the audience decide on the proposal, asking: "What do you propose?" and "How do you want to phrase your proposal?" to make the audience elaborate. The actors initiate voting after discussing for thirty-fourty minutes.]

II.

[A person outside the circle is asked beforehand to raise their hand after one hour and ask if they can join the democracy. Let the audience decide whether to discuss this or return to the previous conversation.]

III.

[There is a signal after 85 minutes.]

Ok, so now the time is almost up. And it seems we have not had time to review all the proposals and vote on them.

So, how many favour voting yes to all the remaining proposals to finalise the constitution?

[The audience votes yes or no.]

Usually, when *Creating Democracy* is performed, we end it with a text that concludes our experience if the audience is interested in listening. How many of you want to listen to this text?

[The audience votes yes or no.]

I believe in making my voice heard. I believe in letting my voice take place on the world stage and my actions take place on the world stage. I believe in the difficulty of talking to each other and speaking for or against each other. I believe in what we have created together today, in the action and the conversation. I believe in dialogue. In the meeting with others. I believe in that which requires us to extend beyond ourselves to reach that which cannot be grasped. I believe in what is between us, in what turns our gaze away from ourselves to our common efforts. This makes us a community through meeting others. I believe there is a meeting beyond all isolated islands of similar views. I believe we have the power to change and are not powerless. Even if it sometimes does not feel like it, we do have the power to change. Not everything, not at the same time, but in small steps. I do not know what awaits us, I

cannot know, but I think I know a way forward. At the same time, I know that others live in the same uncertainty but are just as sure as I am on a path forward. I now understand that it is possible to talk to others, and that it is possible to speak for or against each other. I know there are meeting opportunities beyond all closed islands of similar views. I believe in visiting the opinions of others, in the bodies of others, and in the experiences of others. I believe in letting others visit our minds and learn from our experiences. I believe in the gathering. Together. I believe in togetherness. I believe in gathering, in the square, everyone, in front of the cliff and below the temple. I have stood by the cliff, below the temple, and raised my hand, not to manifest myself, but to manifest the desire and effort of the collective to move forward. We have raised our hands not to manifest ourselves but to manifest the desire and efforts of the collective to move forward. We have shown through words and deeds today that it is possible to talk to others and speak for or against each other. We have created a new togetherness, open to all forms of opportunities and mistakes, where we can learn what it is like to live together. If we believe in dialogue, we can also believe in democracy.

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