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In Dialogue with Society

Democratic Engagement through Theatre

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A wireframe structure, possibly a chair or a decorative piece, is shown in a warm, yellowish light. The structure is made of dark, thin metal rods. Several white, spherical beads are attached to the rods. Some of the beads have simple black smiley faces drawn on them. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere.

Practising Democracy

JÖRGEN DAHLQVIST & FREDRIK HALLER

Practising Democracy

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Amanda Lindh (MP) är ansvarig för demokratifrågor

ett förslag och, om det får tillräckligt med stöd, ska det tas upp som en motion i riksdagen. Vi tror att detta skulle öka människors delaktighet i demokratimellan valen och på så sätt stärka demokratin långsiktigt.

3 Försvåra möjligheten att ändra grundlagar. I fjol tillsatte regeringen en parlamentarisk utredning om grundlagar. I fjol tillsatte regeringen en parlamentarisk utredning om grundlagar. I fjol tillsatte regeringen en parlamentarisk utredning om grundlagar.

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Act 1: Making One's Voice Heard

Actor 1

I believe. I believe in democracy. I believe in democracy and participation. The political participation. I believe in it. In making my voice heard and in shaping the future. That is a right, and it should be recognised as one. I want to help shape the future. I believe that the future is something I create together with others. It is not something I do alone... it is a collective effort.

Actor 2

I believe in community... just like that. I believe in trust... that there is trust among us as citizens... that we share a common ground. Just like that. Exactly like that. Trust is the foundation of our shared efforts to shape the future together. That is what I believe.

Actor 1

I think it also applies to others. Many people feel confident in that common ground and are willing to shape the future together. I know that many people are satisfied with democracy. I have read that. Others besides me feel confident that democracy works. Research supports this. It shows that people are engaging with democracy, not just me. Other than me, but also me.

Actor 2

Research shows that people believe they can influence the future... Together, we can make our voices heard. Over the last twenty years, more and more people have expressed an increased interest in politics. This is reflected in the elections. More people are voting than ever before. That is a good thing. More people are making their voices heard. That is a good thing. All of it is good.

Actor 1

Research shows that interest is growing, and more people are choosing to make their voices heard. That is a good thing. I believe in common ground. We are in this together. Others also believe in democracy and in making their voices heard.

Actor 2

But there are reasons for concern. We must recognise that we are facing a climate crisis. We need to confront the consequences of digitalisation and globalisation. The consequences are real. We see the dismantling of democracy occurring worldwide. In Brazil, Hungary and Russia. The institutions of democracy are being undermined, including rights like freedom of movement, the right to assembly, and the right to make one's voice heard.

Actor 1

The concern is felt here, too. Political parties are losing members, and there is a slow erosion of involvement in party politics. Participation is decreasing. How can parties represent people if they have fewer members?

Actor 2

I share this concern. I recognise it, too. I see the socioeconomic gaps and divides based on ethnicity, education, and housing. Voices are marginalised and often unheard because it is hard to sit at the table where decisions are made. There is a sense of powerlessness... a feeling that one's opinions and feelings do not matter... which leads to marginalisation. The economy and job market play a significant role in this, impacting our living conditions and welfare.

Actor 1

People might think, "Why vote if it does not make a difference? What is the point?" If a vote seems meaningless, why bother? If their situation would not improve or change, why should they vote? The gap between those who engage and those who do not continues to grow between the active and the passive, those who seek influence and those who feel left out.

Actor 2

Some might wonder: "Why vote if it does not make a difference? What is the point?" It seems pointless to vote. Why should I vote when it seems futile, especially if my situation would not improve or change anyway?

That is why the gap is widening between those who get involved and those who do not: the active and the passive. Those who are passive are left out, while the former demand influence.

Actor 1

And worlds are created that, despite existing side by side, do not interact. These overlapping worlds... exclusion and inclusion... are filled with people struggling to make their voices heard. "Why should I vote if it does not make a difference?"

Actor 2

I do not want young people to be forced to grow up in a divided, fragmented society marked by polarisation. There should be spaces where differing opinions can meet, where people with various views on how the future should be shaped can find common ground. I fear a society where individuals fight solely for their existence without wanting to engage with opposing views. It frightens me. I worry that our society will become increasingly divided. Those who need help the most will be the furthest from political decision-making influencing their everyday lives. People must feel empowered to shape their own futures.

Actor 1

I do not want to live in a society where people cannot make their voices heard. I fear that Sweden could follow the path of other countries, leading to a weakened democracy... as we have seen in Brazil, Hungary and Russia. I am anxious that my children might experience such a society.

Actor 2

I cannot stop thinking about these problems and the anxiety they bring. Hope alone would not bring about change. Ignoring issues does not make them disappear. The world does not work that way; something must be done. That is how I feel... that action is necessary.

Actor 1

The globalised world may require new solutions. How do we conceptualise these new forms?

Actor 2

Knowledge is provisional, or so they say. New knowledge replaces the old; therefore, new lessons must influence our democratic practices. I believe community building should be experimental and arise through ongoing dialogue. There is no predetermined path, and since we cannot foresee the future, our solutions must be centred around the current problems.

Actor 1

The democracy report. The latest democracy report. Amanda Lind, the Minister for Culture and Democracy, refers to this report, stating that despite having a stable foundation in Sweden, democracy is still threatened and questioned in various ways. It is vital to protect and evolve our democratic systems. One approach is encouraging initiatives where citizens can propose motions that might become laws. Through such proposals, we can address the challenges facing democracy.

Actor 2

That is why we need your help. We have gathered proposals from research to find solutions to democratic challenges, and we hope you will help us further develop these ideas. We aim to submit the best proposals as a citizen's proposal to the Minister for Democracy.

[The proposals to be discussed can be changed between different performances.]

Actor 1

Here are the proposals. Our first proposal is:

More referendums

Would more referendums be a way to develop and improve Swedish democracy?

Digital citizen forums

Could we develop democracy by creating digital spaces where politicians and citizens can dialogue with each other between elections?

Democratic duty

Could we develop democracy by allowing all citizens to perform compulsory and recurring democratic community service?

Allow young people to vote from 16 years of age

Can a younger voting age allow young people to take a greater place in democracy? Could it increase their willingness to vote?

Social quotas in the parliament

Would social quotas in the parliament be a way to create greater representativeness and increased confidence in democracy?

Global governance

Could a solution be that we in Sweden work for global governance so that it becomes possible to implement the large and comprehensive reforms required for a sustainable future?

Democratic governance of experts

Would a solution to address the challenges we face be if we could vote for experts instead of political parties?

Actor 1

We cannot combine all these different proposals into one. Focusing on just one proposal will have a greater impact. Therefore, we will divide into two groups to discuss these proposals in more detail. Afterwards, we will come back here to decide on the best suggestion.

Actor 2

Knowing which proposal each of you thinks is the best would help guide our discussion effectively. We thought we would start with a quick polling. Please take a moment to consider which proposal you believe is the best.

Actor 1

Please raise your hand if you think the best proposal is:

More referendums
Digital citizen forums
Democratic duty
Allow young people to vote from 16 years of age
Social quotas in the parliament
Global governance
Democratic governance of experts

Actor 2

Now, we will divide into two groups and move to the other room to continue our discussion of these proposals.



Act 2: Speaking for or against Each Other

[The actors discuss the proposals presented, highlighting their pros and cons. They begin with the proposal that received the fewest suggestions and engage with the audience on each proposal.]

Act 3: Power to the People?

[The actors provide an improvised summary of the discussions with the audience. They identify the points of agreement among the different groups and reflect on whether any proposals feel more favourable after the deliberation.]

Actor 1

We have discussed the various proposals. Now, we need to choose the one that we all believe is the best. Therefore, we will vote on the proposals again.

Please raise your hand if you think the best proposal is:

More referendums
Digital citizen forums
Democratic duty
Allow young people to vote from 16 years of age
Social quotas in the parliament
Global governance
Democratic governance of experts

[The actors summarise the result with a reflection on how it differs from the poll that was conducted before the deliberation.]

Actor 2

Democracy can be understood in different ways. It can be viewed either as a decision-making model or as an ideal. Most people tend to think of democracy as a system for making decisions. However, another perspective emphasises democracy primarily as being about citizens' rights and freedoms. This view also allows for a focus on how to distribute

power in the most just manner, which raises questions about whether certain decisions can be more or less democratic.

Actor 1

If we consider democracy a decision-making model, everyone has a vote, can make proposals, and the majority wins. It is the traditional view. However, it does not account for the fact that some citizens may be more committed to certain issues than others. For example, the issue of the wolf population in Sweden involves a small segment of the population that is very engaged in the question. At the same time, it is not a significant concern for the vast majority. Should we, here in Stockholm, be involved in making decisions about it? Now, we will conduct a second vote, in which each person has five votes to distribute as they wish... either spreading them across different proposals or putting all five on one proposal. This approach takes the group's level of engagement into account.

Please show, with your fingers, how many votes you want to distribute on each proposal:

- More referendums
- Digital citizen forums
- Democratic duty
- Allow young people to vote from 16 years of age
- Social quotas in the parliament
- Global governance
- Democratic governance of experts

[The actors summarise the result by reflecting on how it differs from the previous vote.]

Actor 2

Even in a well-functioning democracy, minorities may feel that, regardless of how they vote, their perspectives will never prevail. For instance, imagine you have a film club with two friends. Every Friday, you rent a film and watch it together. Your friends enjoy French avant-garde films from the 1960s, while you prefer American comedies. To decide which

film to watch, you vote to reach a consensus. Although the majority rules, you end up not seeing the movies you like. Despite the process being democratic, you feel unfairly treated.

Actor 1

We would like to experiment with you. We want to try a different method for selecting among our proposals to explore the most democratic way to express our collective will. We will decide by lottery. This allows proposals that only a minority supported to have a chance of being selected.

[Actor 2 uses a lottery tombola to get a result.]

[The actors summarise the result by reflecting on how it differs from the previous vote. What do you think about this experiment? Which method do you believe is the fairest? Which proposals should we include in our proposal?]

Actor 2

Ok, now it is time to formulate a citizens' proposal.

Title. Citizens' proposal for the development of democracy.

We propose that the Parliament should decide in favour of **[the selected proposal]**

Motivation:

Research and reports, with the aim of analysing the need for and preparing proposals for measures to increase and broaden the involvement of representative democracy, have made several proposals for a series of measures to strengthen the individual's opportunities for participation in and influence political decision-making. We have discussed these proposals and come up with one that best meets the challenges that democracy faces. We believe that the government should work to make this proposal law. We also believe that the introduction of this proposal will lead to more people feeling that they can be involved in shaping their future and that politics will thereby have a greater opportunity to address the great challenges of today. In addition, we have also understood that the public discourse itself is a

solution to the challenges of democracy. Together we have tried to understand and find solutions to societal problems and argued for solutions to these in front of each other. We have also understood that it is possible to practice democratic processes: to enter the world stage and to speak for or against each other there and to contribute with one's knowledge and experiences to, together with others, allow a diversity of thoughts and arguments to form a common future. Although this motion may not come to a decision, we hope that our joint efforts will have an effect by contributing to a common ground for meeting the challenges that democracy will face in the future.

Proposal for a parliamentary resolution:

Item 1. The Parliament supports the decision stated in this proposal and announces this to the Government after approval.

Proposal Category: Citizen's proposal

Assigned: Responsible Minister with responsibility for democracy and human rights.

Events

Created: [Today's Date.]

Submitted:

Authors of the proposal: The ensemble and the audience members at the performance *Creating Democracy*, The Royal Dramatic Theatre.

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