

# THE DEMOCRACY HANDBOOK

*How to actively work  
with associational democracy*



## THE DEMOCRACY HANDBOOK

– How to actively work with associational democracy

©DUF – the Danish Youth Council

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# PREFACE

All DUF - the Danish Youth Council's member organizations are founded upon democracy. This means all the organizations' members have a right to speak at general assemblies and thereby influence their association. This is an easily visible example of democracy in an association. Additionally, an invisible 'democratic glue' exists in the associations, exemplified by volunteers teaching children and young people to be part of a community with everything that entails. They learn to work together and make decisions for the good of the community - even though they may not agree with each other. They learn to dare, to take responsibility, and to show leadership. They also learn that they have value as human beings simply by being part of the community and because their opinion matters. All of this is crucial to being part of a democratic community, whether it is a small, local community or a large, national, or global community. In brief, how associations work is fundamental for democracy. For this reason, we at DUF wish to inspire all of you to continue developing strong and resilient democrats worldwide.

Enjoy the book and best of luck working with active associational democracy.

*Chris Borup Preuss,*  
Formand for DUF - Dansk Ungdoms Fællesråd



# INTRODUCTION

## DEAR READER

DUF has written this handbook for you who seek inspiration on how to develop democracy, wherever you are and in whatever community you are part of.

Perhaps you love to dive into democratic work and learn how your association can work actively with democracy. Or maybe you face a concrete dilemma and need good advice. Regardless of why you have opened this book, you can find tools to identify how associational democracy works as well as its potential in your own community.

And by democracy, we do not only mean articles of associations, votes, and showing up for the annual general assembly. Because democracy may be a fundamental part of many associations, but it is so much more. Demo-crazy is when we create positive frameworks that let everyone be heard, take responsibility, and influence communities without demanding that people are alike to work together.

### **How to use the book**

The book is meant for you who actively participate in an association and who is responsible for developing and managing the association. It has many uses, but it is especially relevant for board members, volunteer leaders, employees, and others working with development and management in associations.

In the book, you will find suggestions for how you and your community may work actively to:

- assess the level of democracy in your own association
- prepare the members to participate in and engage themselves in their association
- create fruitful decision-making processes
- work together despite disagreements
- promote ownership and responsibility for developing and managing the association - and engage new types of volunteers
- manage and prevent conflicts through dialogue.

Even though the book may not offer solutions or answers for everything, we hope it will help you kickstart a constructive dialogue on your own democratic community - and help you see how you form the democratic citizens of the future.

### **Why work with associational democracy**

There are many reasons to work with democracy in your association. Here are two:

#### **1. A well-functioning democracy engages...**

To engage yourself in the internal workings of your association is to engage yourself in its democracy. The better the members are prepared to participate and use their membership rights, the better their engagement, abilities, and potentials can be utilized. To do this, you need a living and open associational democracy that actively engages and involves people.

#### **2. ...and develops young people**

Every day, DUF's member organizations strive to make a difference for children and young people in Denmark and the rest of the world. Not just by creating meaningful activities and communities, but also by promoting valuable lessons on democracy. By actively participating and taking responsibility for activities in their associations and through DUF's many

international partnerships, children and young people learn to collaborate, to create and see the potential for change, and to find their own entry-way to democracy. If youths in the associations are to acquire democratic competencies, it is crucial that everyone can participate voluntarily - and that they actually do participate.

Therefore, you should always be curious about creating the best setting for your members to contribute and to dare to take responsibility.

We hope you can use this book to find the necessary inspiration to accomplish exactly that.

### **TO WORK WITH ASSOCIATIONAL DEMOCRACY IS TO:**

- establish the basic framework for how your community should function in your association
- support members taking part in discussions and decision-making processes that are part of the association's activities and purpose
- give young people the competencies needed to become active, democratic citizens; namely, the ability to feel empathy, the ability to enter dialogue, the ability to disagree together, the ability to defend your own opinion, the ability to listen, and many others
- prepare young people to work together despite differences
- promote sound, holistic decision-making processes
- create a positive framework where everyone can be involved and dare to take responsibility and ownership of the common cause and activities.

### How the book came to be

In the spring of 2020, members and employees of DUF toured Denmark to find inspiration in the fantastic associations and democratic organizations found among DUF's membership organizations. Through dialogue meetings in four Danish cities, a diverse gathering of volunteers from all parts of society shared their experiences and understandings of associational democracy. These meetings make up the foundation for the theoretical and practical aspects of this handbook. Afterward, DUF has developed and gathered exercises that may be used for inspiration. The book borrows or refers to other democratic actors' concepts in a few places.

### Reading guide

The book can be used as a reference book and a toolbox for new and experienced democracy enthusiasts. For the busy reader, we recommend focusing on the themes most relevant for your association right now.

Chapter 1 identifies the concept of democracy and describes what is unique about associational democracy. The purpose is to establish a common frame of reference for the rest of the book and to create a language for talking about democracy in your association. Chapter 2 offers exercises to reflect on how you understand and work with your version of associational democracy.

The second part of the book provides insights into four relevant themes in an associational democracy. It is all about how you as an association may succeed with:

1. preparing members to use their voice
2. engage members and let them actively contribute
3. make decisions together
4. work together despite differences and disagreements.

All sections have tips on how you can prevent or manage typical challenges you may face as well as concrete exercises, tools, and checklists for working with your associational democracy. If you become inspired to try out some of it (and we hope you do!), please remember two things:

### It is okay to be a beginner

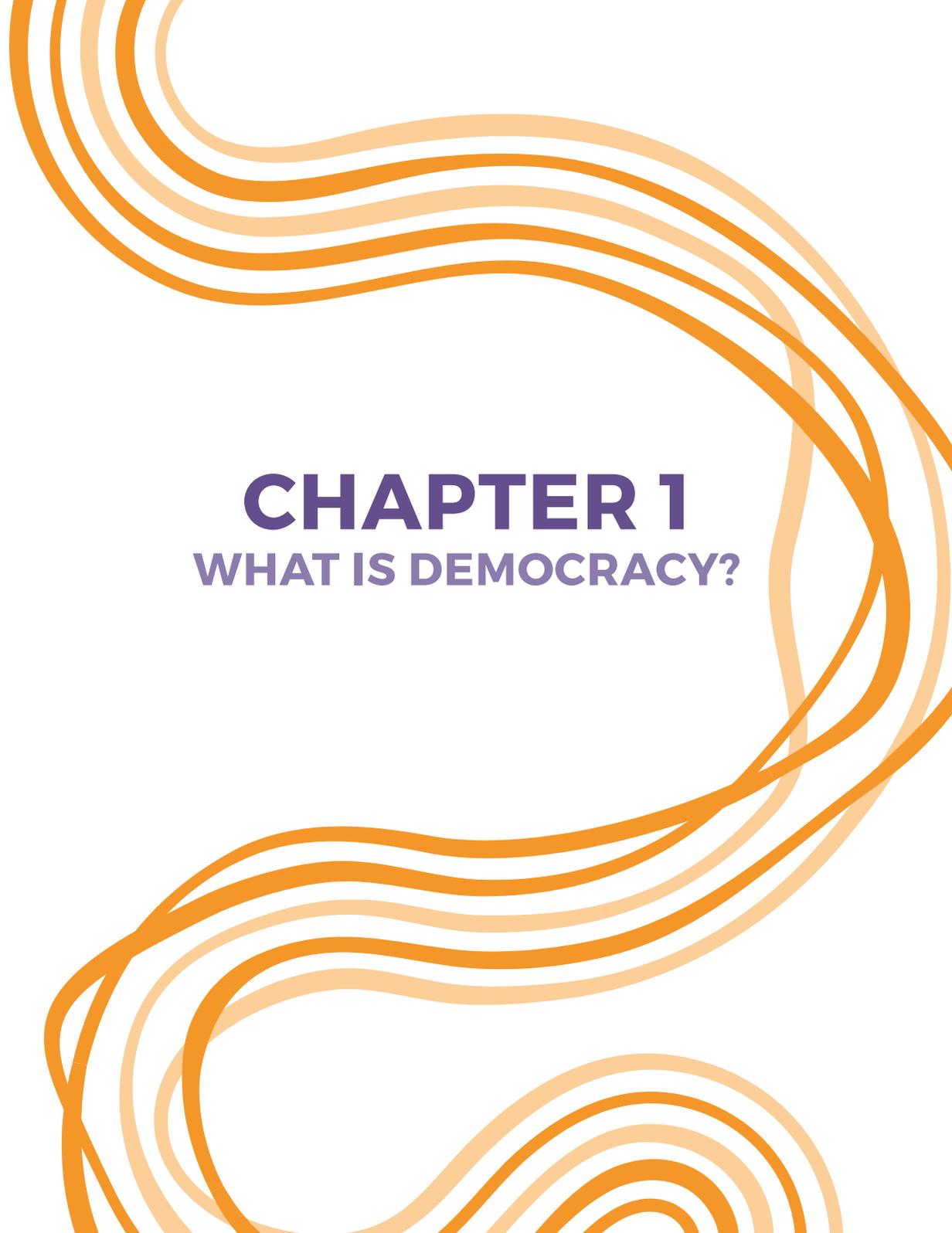
It takes time to make something work for the first time. And it is not always easy. But is it worth the try? Yes, most definitely! It may feel awkward and artificial at the beginning, and that is all right. That is how it is with many things when you try them for the first time. Start small and try out what works for you and remember to talk about what went well and where you can make improvements.

### Do your own experiments

Consider what suits your association specifically. One exercise may work in theory but not in practice. Perhaps you may need to be adapt it to work in your community. Tools may also work differently depending on your type of association and the situation or challenge you face. What works in one case may not work in another. What one person may feel is relevant and useful, another may disagree with. Something may work for a while, and then it may not work anymore. That is okay.

What is most important is always making room for talking about and working with your associational democracy - and maybe going in new directions based on what feels right for you. You should experiment to find solutions suitable for the challenges you face and to figure out what works for you and your association.





# **CHAPTER 1**

## **WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?**



[Democracy] is not the result of a task you complete once; it is a task that must be completed again and again.”

– Hal Koch, founder of DUF

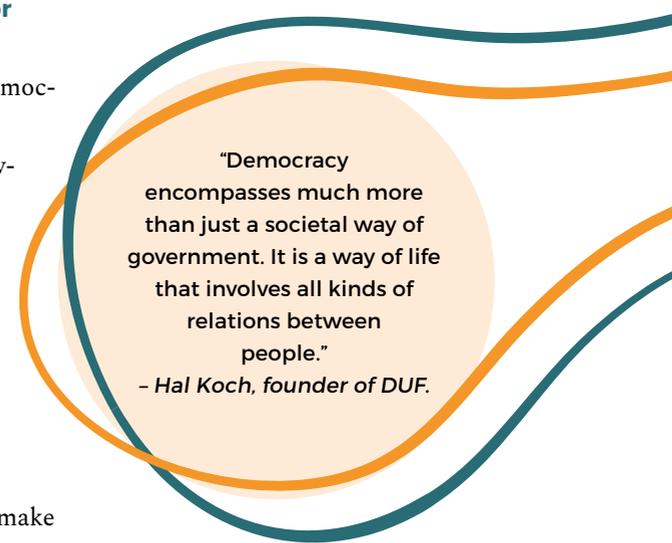
## WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

The first step toward working actively with associational democracy is to clarify precisely what democracy is. When we have a common language for talking about democracy, we have an easier time recognizing when democracy works and when it needs servicing.

Democracy is a tricky concept to work with, even though much has been written about it already. There are no definitive answers to what democracy is - not even in this handbook. Democracy is complex and ever-changing. It changes because its practitioners are what defines it, and when people and society change, so do democracy. Thus, it is best not to think about democracy as a fixed end-goal, but instead as an ever-evolving process. There is no one right answer - there are many. Now, when all of this is said, let us look at some widely used ways of understanding democracy.

### A way of government or a way of life?

Basically, you can view democracy as a way of government or a way of life. However, the two views are very much interdependent. First, it is a **way of government** that ensures democracy through democratic rules of government, constitutions, and formal procedures that determine, e.g., who may make



“Democracy encompasses much more than just a societal way of government. It is a way of life that involves all kinds of relations between people.”

– Hal Koch, founder of DUF.

decisions and how. Democracy as a way of government is the way that prioritizes elections, votes, and the political-judicial system with its defined rules, roles, and rights. Representative democracy is an example of a democratic way of government.

Second, democracy can also be viewed as a **way of life** or a specific way to act in the world. It is something that affects all of us, every day, and not just when we participate in elections. For this reason, it is sometimes referred to as everyday democracy. It is all about how we meet each other in practice and how we interact in our communities. Democracy as a way of life includes specific democratic behaviors or ways of thinking that we only learn through democratic participation. Conversation and participatory democracy are examples of democracy as a way of life.

Talking about one way of democracy is difficult without talking about the other. DUF's member organizations are organized around democracy as a way of government. Still, it varies to what extent democracy is implemented in the individual associations. For some, democracy as a way of government is dominant; for others, it is mostly a way of life. No matter what, they complement each other nicely.

## FOUR IDEAS ABOUT DEMOCRACY

Many perceptions and types of democracy exist, and they can easily coexist. Here are four of them:

- 1 PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY** is an ideal that focuses on letting everyone participate actively in democracy in their own life situations and that engages us as co-creators of the communities we are part of. The right to co-determination and the opportunity to affect decisions and actions are core values of a participatory democracy.
- 2 INVOLVEMENT** as an ideal is all about involving people in decisions that affect themselves. Involvement is seen as a democratic responsibility; it commits the community and the society to create the necessary framework to ensure everyone can share their opinions and be taken seriously.
- 3 REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY** is when we elect representatives to manage our interests and make important decisions on our behalf. We choose our representatives through formal elections. An election for seats on the board of directors is a good example of a representative democracy in associations.
- 4 CONVERSATIONAL DEMOCRACY** values democracy as a free and open dialogue where everyone's voice can be heard on an equal footing. It entails a specific democratic approach based on dialogue, understanding, and a willingness to compromise where we remain open to other people's views while seeking to find common solutions.

## DEMOCRACY IS...

Democracy is many things. If we are to break down the concept of democracy, here are a couple of characteristics. Among others, democracy is:

### ...a way to be together

Democracy is found between people. It is a team sport focusing on meeting each other and existing as a community. Do we exist through mutual understanding and respect, or through prejudice? Do we listen, or do we ignore? Can we work together for a common cause even though we have diverging opinions?

### ...compromise and conversation

Many believe conversation to be at the core of democracy. This means meeting each other to listen and talk and to understand each other better, so that we may find common solutions for the good of all, not just the majority.

### ...a way to share power

Simply put, democracy is to let 'the people' govern. People share the right to determine and make decisions between themselves. Hence, it is a question of who is allowed to make decisions within the framework of the community.

### ...equal rights

Ideally, everyone has a voice and can influence a democracy. This is due to a basic set of rights that govern us all. For example, we have freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and the right to be informed, involved, and heard in matters concerning ourselves.

### ...the rights and obligation to participate

Democracy is built on participation. We are all obligated to participate and let our voices be heard. Similarly, the community is also obligated to encourage and make room for all to actively contribute to the democracy.

### ...something that can be learned and trained

Democracy is an exercise in working together and an exercise in using our voice and influence. However, no one is born a democrat. It is gradually learned and improved through participation and action, and it will not happen overnight.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- How do we view democracy in our association?
- What role does democracy play in our community?
- What types of democracy are present and where?
- Where do we view democracy as a way of government, and where do we view it as a way of life?
- Are both equally important for well-functioning associations?

## EXERCISE: PUTTING WORDS ON DEMOCRACY

**WHY:** When is something democratic? The purpose of the exercise is to create a common language for what democracy is and can be and also for what it is not.

**WHAT:** You will need a set of red cards, a set of green cards, pens, and enough room for you to work together all of you and in smaller groups. This exercise can be done by all groups no matter their size. Although, it does require a skilled facilitator.

**HOW:** Assign a facilitator. The remaining participants are split into smaller groups with three to five members.

### ➔ STEP BY STEP:

- The participants are handed two green and a red card. On the green cards, they finish the sentence ‘Democracy is...’, and on the red card, they finish the sentence ‘Democracy is not...’ (use 5-10 minutes).

**EXAMPLE:** ‘Democracy is listening to each other’ – democracy is NOT forcing your own opinion on others.”

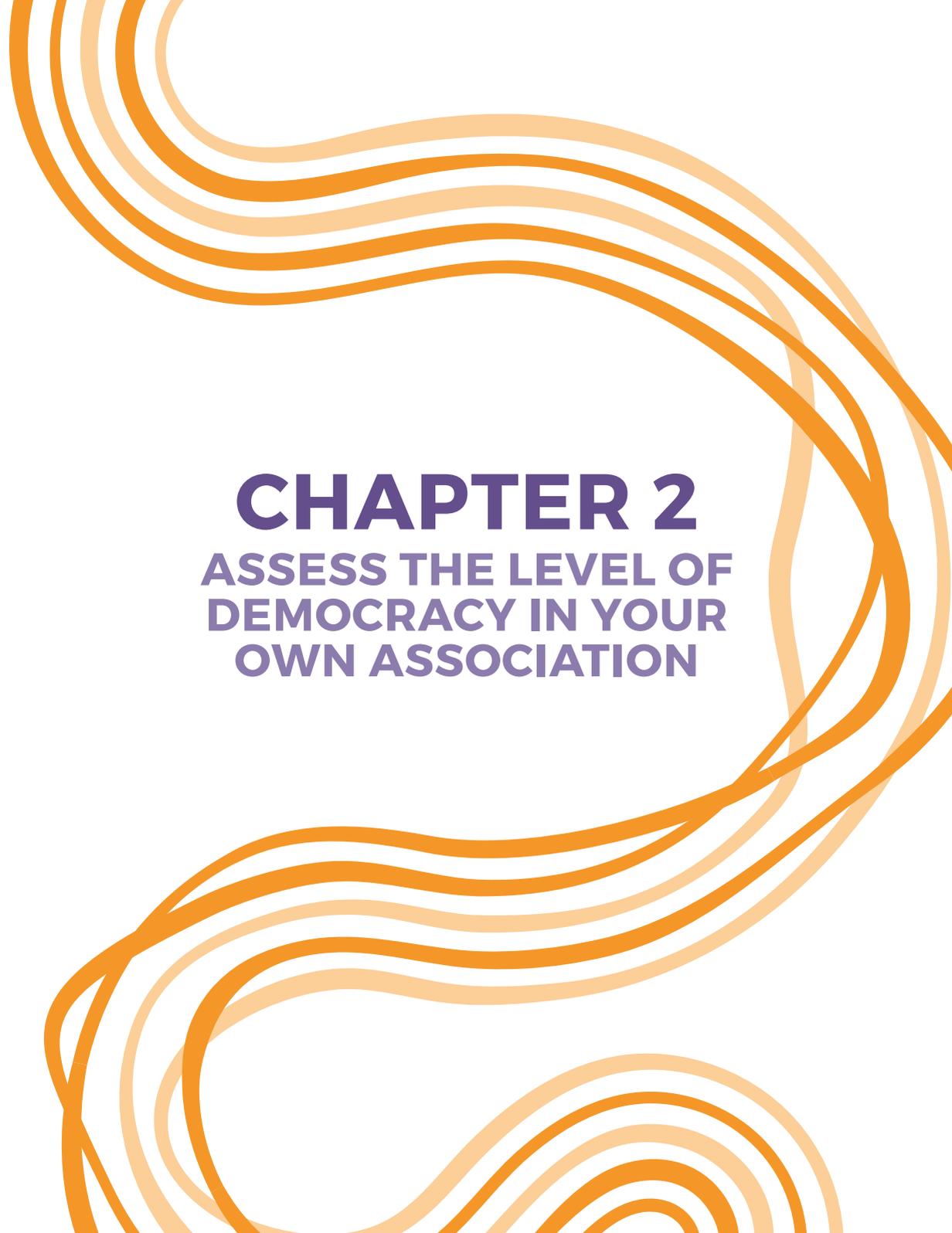
- The participants gather in a circle. Then one by one, they all present what they have written on their cards. Start with the green cards, then move on to the red ones. It is all right to briefly explain the reasoning behind what you have written on your card.
- During the presentations, the facilitator poses explanatory or challenging questions to the participants: Can you elaborate on what you mean by X and Y? Have you experienced this yourself? What do the rest of you think about this?

- Finish the session with a brief evaluation. What conclusions have you reached? Is there something you may have missed?

**VARIATION:** By yourself, think about the least and the most democratic thing you can imagine. Take a couple of minutes, and then do a roundtable where everyone presents what they have thought about.

You can use this variation as a fun exercise to begin your meetings or when you need a break. It may also help you get used to talking about democracy and expand your democratic vocabulary.





**CHAPTER 2**  
**ASSESS THE LEVEL OF  
DEMOCRACY IN YOUR  
OWN ASSOCIATION**

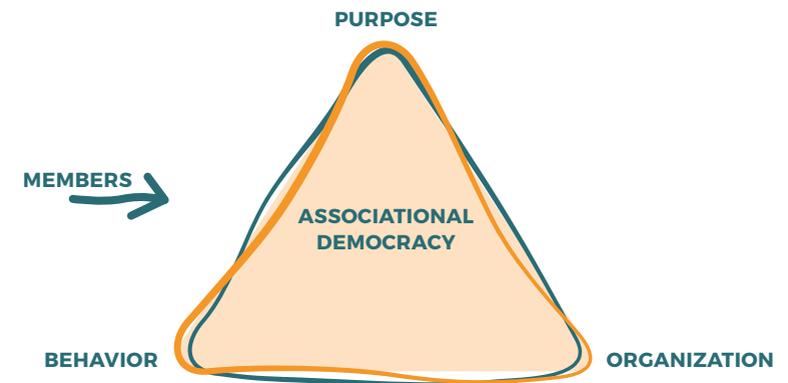


Democracy cannot be assured  
– exactly because it is not  
a system to be achieved once,  
but a way of life to be acquired.  
It is about specific disposition  
that must be imparted to each and  
every generation.”

– Hal Koch, founder of DUF

## ASSESS THE LEVEL OF DEMOCRACY IN YOUR OWN ASSOCIATION

Let us zoom in on the democracy found in associations - what we call associational or membership democracy. You can use this triangle model to illustrate associational democracy as something that happens in the interaction between three parameters.



### 1. The democratic philosophy

The democratic philosophy concerns itself with the principles, values, and purposes that form your democracy. All associations are based on what you wish to achieve together as a community.

Be it to introduce youths to a particular political ideology, protect the environment, or foster an interest in art, all associations have a purpose. The philosophy shapes our view of how we act together and how we construct our community. Many associations are based on democratic values that promote participation, dialogue, co-determination, involvement, openness, etc. These values are expressed through your activities and organiza-

tion. In a way, they represent the ‘spirit’ of associational democracy. Ask yourself:

- What values are essential for our association?
- How are they reflected in our community?
- Are all our members aware of our values, both the board and the ordinary members?

## 2. Democratic organization

A set of formal rules that all agree on are necessary when many people are part of the same association. The purpose of the rules is to establish a foundation for healthy democratic processes and define a framework for who can join the association and how you lead and make decisions. It is all the formally agreed and often written democratic structures in an association, e.g., articles of association, rules of procedure, regulations, membership rights, and roles. It also covers formal procedures to ensure transparency in everything from minutes, financial statements, and clear guidelines for activities. Ask yourself:

- What rights and obligations are imparted to you as a member of your association?
- What roles and possible ways of influence exist?
- Does everyone know the formal structures and ways of influence?
- How do we ensure that our organization supports an active democracy?

## 3. Democratic practice

Neither the association’s philosophy nor its organization has any meaning if they are not reflected in its members’ behavior or the association’s culture. Thus, democratic practice is about what transpires. It can be measured by whether the members use their democratic rights to influence the association. They can do this by taking responsibility, expressing their opinions, enter dialogue, participate in meetings on the business of the association or general assemblies, run for the board, etc. Democratic prac-

tice is also measured in the informal or ‘soft’ sides of democracy where the focus is on how values like dialogue, involvement, and equality are practiced. In many ways, the democratic practice is where **everyday democracy** is expressed. Ask yourself:

- How do we act democratically in our association?
- How democratic are our social conventions?
- How much do our members participate in the development and management of the association? Who participates – and who does not?
- What areas do you feel the members wish to participate in, and where is it difficult to motivate them?
- How easy or how difficult is it to influence our association?

### The three cornerstones of associational democracy

DEMOCRACY PARAMETERS	PHILOSOPHY	ORGANIZATION	PRACTICE
<b>Characteristics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideas</li> <li>• Purpose</li> <li>• Values Visions</li> <li>• Narratives</li> <li>• Dreams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rules</li> <li>• Articles of association</li> <li>• Rights</li> <li>• Volunteer and membership roles</li> <li>• Formal procedures</li> <li>• Elections</li> <li>• Organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavior</li> <li>• Norms</li> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Social conventions ‘jargons’</li> <li>• Actual democratic participation</li> </ul>
<b>Questions to ask yourself</b>	What aims and values do we have for democratic participation in the association?	What formal and organizational frameworks do we create for democratic participation?	How do our members participate in informal and formal democratic and volunteer work?



## TOOLBOX

To assess your associational democracy, here are two exercises that can be done separately or in conjunction. Both exercises are suitable for smaller groups such as a board or a limited group of volunteers. But they can also be used for an open workshop with a wider selection of your members. Do appoint a facilitator to guide you through the exercises and to maintain an overview.

**TIME NEEDED:** You can use an hour or an entire day for the exercises. Scale the exercises based on what makes sense for you. We encourage you to select just the parts that fit your current situation.

**NOTE:**

**BE AWARE OF DEMOCRACY WHEN CHANGE IS HAPPENING**

Have you lost your passion? Are new members taking up a lot of space without consideration for others? Have internal groupings arisen, or have the context changed in other ways? Perhaps you have new board members?

Be aware that things may change rapidly and that a strong democratic community must be nurtured like a garden. Do assess your democracy if you have experienced many changes lately.

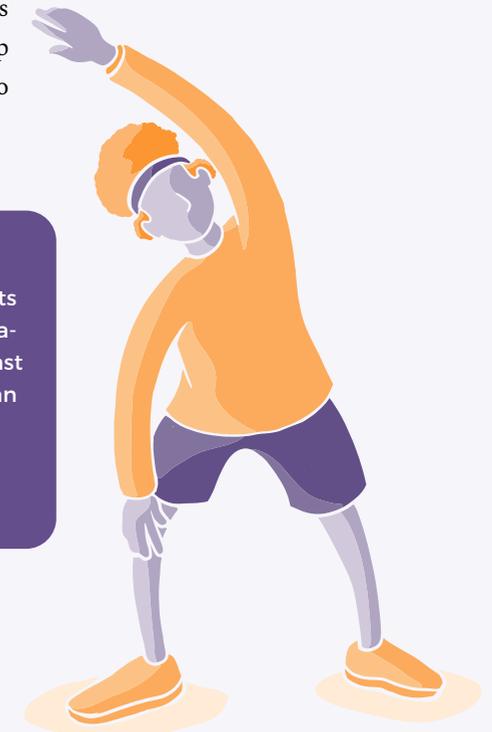
### Warm-up

As a warm-up for both exercises, reflect individually or in pairs on:

- Why is democracy important in our association?
- How is everyday democracy connected with how the community works?
- What is a good democratic community for us?

You could make these reflections during a walk-and-talk. It energizes you and opens you for other thoughts and ideas compared to sitting around a table talking. After 5-10 minutes, return to the group and spend some time listening to the others' reflections. Remember to record ideas and valuable reflections on post-its or a flip chart and write down the participants' explanations. When everyone has had their say, conclude the warm-up and move on to one of the next two exercises.

**TIP:** If the participants have trouble expressing their thoughts about democracy in your association, consider returning to the last question and ask: "How would an undemocratic community look like?" Sometimes, it is easier to imagine reverse scenarios.



## EXERCISE 1: VALUE GRAND PRIX

**WHY:** The purpose of the exercise is to discuss your democratic values. Challenges often arise when values are transformed into concrete activities. Are our actions and social conventions aligned with our values? The best way to anticipate challenges is to be aware of the association's democratic values and ensure that members are also aware of them.

**WHAT:** You will need a printed version of the 'value plate' found on the next page (you could also create your own), stickers or the like, a flip chart, or a large piece of paper for every group.

### HOW:

#### ➡ STEP 1: Warm-up

See the instructions on the previous page.

#### ➡ STEP 2: What are the values of your community?

Print or make a 'value plate' so everyone has one. Together, you now need to identify your values as a community. Everyone has ten minutes to choose the five most important values that signify their association. You may also introduce new values.

#### ➡ STEP 3: Vote on the values and divide yourself into groups

Write all the values on a flip chart or similar. Everyone may now put three stickers by the values that preoccupy them the most. The five values with most stickers move on to the next round.

Now, select one or two of these values that you consider important. Use this as a basis for forming small groups (max. five people in each group). You can either form groups based on similar values or have all groups discuss the two values with the most votes. Do what makes sense for you.

**TIP:** Write the values on a large piece of paper on the floor and use candy to vote instead of stickers.

INCLUSION	DIALOGUE	CO-RESPONSIBILITY
EQUAL PARTICIPATION	MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY	OPENNESS
COMMUNITY	COLLABORATION	EMPATHY
RESPECT	INVOLVEMENT	ACTIVISM
JOINT SOLUTIONS	FREEDOM	DIVERSITY
ENGAGEMENT	OWNERSHIP	DEVELOPMENT
CURIOSITY	ACTIVE LISTENING	DECISION MAKING
MINORITY PROTECTION	COMPROMISE	OPEN COMMUNICATION
SAFETY	TRUST	LEARNING
EMPOWERMENT	ANYTHING ELSE?	

➡ **STEP 4: How do you ensure your values are present in practice?**

All groups discuss ‘their’ values based on the four points of the schema on the next page. The aim is to get closer to a mutual understanding of your values and to learn more about how you actively use the values and put them to use.

**TIP:** During step 3, be as specific and action oriented as possible; it will make it easier to spot when you succeed in making your values come to life.

➡ **STEP 5: Joint discussion and conclusion**

Conclude by presenting the results of all the group talks. Talk about your thoughts on the groups’ answers:

- Do you have anything to add?
- Is there something you view differently?
- What will you take with you from this exercise?
- How will you ensure that your values are practiced?  
How do you follow up?

<p><b>1</b> <b>WHAT WE UNDERSTAND BY OUR VALUES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do we understand the value?</li><li>• What is this value supposed to do?</li></ul> <p><b>Example:</b> <i>A core value is that we listen to one another. This means that we are curious about others’ perspectives and ask one another openly so everyone feels like they have been seen and heard.</i></p>	<p><b>2</b> <b>WHERE DO WE SEE THE VALUE IN PRACTICE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Where is the value expressed in our community?</li><li>• Where do we succeed in practicing the value, and where can we improve?</li></ul> <p><b>Example:</b> <i>We have a strong community where we listen to those we know. However, we are not as skilled at including new people in our conversations if they do not try to do so themselves.</i></p>
<p><b>4</b> <b>PRACTICAL SUPPORT:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do we know whether we succeeded in promoting the value?</li><li>• What do we do if we fail?</li></ul> <p><b>Example:</b> <i>New members feel included - we make sure to ask about their experiences joining the association. We invite the members to a joint workshop to outline a ‘great welcome’ agreement for how to greet new members, which will visibly present and regularly revised.</i></p>	<p><b>3</b> <b>ACTIONS TO FURTHER THE VALUE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What actions should we do more frequently or less frequently to make this value live? Should we start up new initiatives?</li><li>• Who is responsible for acting?</li></ul> <p><b>Example:</b> <i>We must always greet new volunteers ask them about their lives, so we get to know each other better. When new volunteers have not been included or seem insecure, it is a joint responsibility to ensure that new volunteers are properly greeted invited into our community.</i></p>

## EXERCISE 2: THE DEMOCRATIC JOURNEY

**WHY:** The purpose of the exercise is to put the spot on your democracy and learn more about what works well and may be improved. The exercise will take you all the way from an analysis of your associational democracy to an action plan and experiments in your association.

**WHAT:** You will need paper so all participants can write down their strengths and weaknesses. The exercise also requires a large piece of paper or a whiteboard for notetaking during discussions. It is a good idea to appoint a minute taker, so all your ideas and inputs are preserved for later use.

### HOW:

#### 🔗 STEP 1: Warm-up

See the instructions on page 31.

#### 🔗 STEP 2: How is your democracy localized right now?

To reach a destination on your democratic journey, you must be familiar with your current position, i.e., your democratic strengths and weaknesses. Start by mapping where your associational democracy is right now. Use a general discussion or smaller groups to discuss:

- Are there areas or situations where we excel at democracy?  
What do we do well? Can we use this in other situations?
- Are there areas or situations where we could be better at democracy?  
How can we do that? What barriers exist, and how can we change them?

One-by-one, share your thoughts on the matter. While talking, fill-out your strengths and weaknesses in a joint-schema or a flip chart.

### EXAMPLES OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES:

When we hold board meetings, we excel at democracy. We listen to one another and respect our disagreements.

When we begin projects, our democratic approach is not as good. The board's decisions are not always properly founded among our members.

#### 🔗 STEP 3: Where does the democracy journey lead?

It is now time to decide on a 'destination' for the democracy journey. Use a general discussion or smaller groups to discuss:

- What is the overall picture of our associational democracy?
- Where do we see the greatest potential for improvements?
- Where do we dream of being in six months? Where do we wish to go?

Based on your talk, define at least two goals: one that is ambitious and one that is realistic - be as specific as possible.

We must be better at preparing new board members for participating in our associational democracy.

We must be better at situating the board's decisions among our members.



#### ➔ STEP 4: Action plan - how do we get there?

When you have reached one or two goals, the next step is to make an action plan. Use a general discussion or smaller groups to discuss what you want to do to achieve your goal. Be as specific as possible and remember that everything counts. Use a schema like the one below to fill-in your goals and actions.

ACTION PLAN	EXAMPLES
<b>Where do you want to go?</b>	<i>We want to spend less time quarreling over disagreements and more time having a good time while getting to know each other.</i>
<b>What must we do to get there?</b>	<i>Once a month, we will arrange joint dialogue exercises like active listening to conclude social events.</i>
<b>Are there any obstacles on your journey? How do you take them into account?</b>	<i>It is always the same people that show up for our events. We will therefore try to invite members in new ways, perhaps using a hand-written invitation, a video greeting, or a personalized text message.</i>
<b>How do we ensure that everyone is on board?</b>	<i>We let our members choose and plan the social event to let them have ownership of it.</i>

#### ➔ TRIN 5: The democratic laboratory

The last step involves just trying it out. Use your action plan as a springboard for small experiments in your association or community to learn what works and what does not. An experiment could be regular dialogue exercises like the example from the action plan.

Try out a new initiative for a month or two before evaluating:

- How did it go?
- What worked and what did not?
- Should you continue?
- Or should you change something?

Perhaps you will successfully implement a new, little initiative or refine an existing one. You may need to adjust some of the features to get a new initiative to work. Or you may discover something completely different that will help you on your journey. Remember to evaluate continuously and to use your learnings to understand what works for you. You can then use your learnings to start up new experiments to continue your democratic journey.



**TIP:** Use chapters 3-6 in this book to get specific advice, methods, and exercises for working with various themes within associational democracy.

## SPEED COURSE: HOW TO WORK WITH INCLUSION

Can everyone access your democratic community? Can you identify certain youth groups that have never joined your association? Or are certain youth groups under-represented in specific roles, groups, or processes in your association? When you have assessed your associational democracy, you may have concluded that inclusion, diversity, and equality are part of your values or purpose.

Even in the most inclusive communities, some youths will be under-represented. These groups may include youths with specific needs, disabilities, members of minority groups, youths placed outside of their family, or youths without a job or an education. It may also be that parts of your member base are under-represented in your activities, in your groups of volunteers, or among the board members. Perhaps only youths living close to your association participate in your social events, or perhaps only university students run for the board. It varies from community to community which groups are under-represented.

The issue may be more about what is under-represented and less about *who* are under-represented. Potential members may be found outside your community, members who prefer certain forms of participation that are under-represented in your community. They may be attracted to other ideas, activity forms, or forms of organization. When you ask volunteers what motivates them to be part of a community, they often answer that they can contribute and make a difference. This knowledge comes from DUF's research in inclusion efforts *Alle Unge med i Fællesskabet* ('Include all youths in the community'). When asked about how they will motivate under-represented youths to join the community, the volunteers answered that it is all about providing a wide selection of activities. Hence, they focus on resources when they talk about their motivation, but from a lack of resources when talking about people's motivation outside the community.

This leads back to the original question of whether potential members may be found outside your community that prefers forms of participation that focus more on co-determination and participation.

### Focus on where under-representation is found

To create more inclusion and representation in a democratic community, you should first look inwards and explore who is missing from your community and what it takes to be part of your community.

Inclusion is also about daring to invite new members into the community and to do things differently than what you usually do. Two strategies to include inclusion and diversity in your association exists:

**1) Spread your community:** A traditional way for volunteer leaders to recruit new members or volunteers is to use their own network, which of course has its limitations. It may be advantageous to reach out to people who do not yet know your association because you usually promote the association in places where they are not present.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Where do we find under-representation, and where do we wish to create representation?
- What are our forms of participation and forms of community? What does it take to be part of our association?
- How can we work to increase the representation?

Other youths may need a helping hand to get in the door and join your association or a certain activity. This could be in the form of a direct invitation or five! Some youths need many invitations to feel safe enough to seek out a new community. The youths in question may also feel more comfortable with a mentor or a buddy to help them enter your community.

Therefore, you should ask yourself:

- Who are under-represented in our community, and how well do your forms of participation fit them?
- How can we spread our community to include more under-represented youths that fit our forms of participation?

**2) Expand your community:** You may also need to adapt your community to young people with other needs or motivations than those shaping your current forms of participation and community. Often, this includes creating new activities or forms of participation with an eye to including those

“It is important that the association has a structure that allows everyone equal prerequisites for participation. If some do not show up, ask them why so you can find out why and perhaps adapt your structures to accommodate them.”  
- young volunteer.

STRATEGY	SPREAD YOUR COMMUNITY	EXPAND YOUR COMMUNITY
<b>Examples</b>	<p><b>Aim:</b> <i>We wish to get more of our young or inexperienced members to join our working groups.</i></p> <p><b>Solution:</b> <i>We always make sure that there are spaces reserved for younger or new members. We make a conscious effort to create a safe space and acknowledge that new group members participate based on other terms.</i></p>	<p><b>Aim:</b> <i>We wish to reach youths who can rarely join physical activities due to a lack of transportation or reduced mobility.</i></p> <p><b>Solution:</b> <i>We explore whether some of our activities can be converted to an online format, e.g., a political debate, a quiz, or community singing.</i></p>

who either cannot or are not interested in participating within the current framework. This is a question of expanding your way of being together so more young people seek out your association and activities and experience that they can join on their own terms.

Therefore, you should ask yourself:

- What forms of participation are under-represented in our community, and how can we include them in a meaningful way.
- How do we expand our community to include more under-represented youths who prefer other forms of participation?

## The norm critical approach to inclusion

Another way to work with inclusion is to focus on the norms of your community. Norms are what we as a group see as 'normal' or 'that is just how it is'. Norms are everywhere - in our language, behavior, and organization - they are expressed through unconscious habits, perceptions, and rules that we take for granted, like when we say "hello" when we meet someone we know.

A norm is not necessarily a negative thing. However, it is important to note that some norms may create unequal forms of participation and may be limiting for those who go against them. Norms can lead to the idea of something being more 'correct' than something else. This can exclude people with another sense of identity, religious belief, political persuasion, or background other than the majority of the community.

Norms can make you blind to the fact that we create communities based on what the majority see as 'normal'. An example is when wheelchair access is not considered when planning an activity because we as a society assume that everyone can use the stairs.

Suppose you, as an association, wish to create a more inclusive community. In that case, it is a good idea to be familiar with norm critique - an approach to working with norms in a community. If you, as an association, wish to create a more inclusive community, it is a good idea to be familiar with norm criticism - an approach to working with norms in a community. Here, it is important to reflect continuously on your practice and identify the norms that may limit some people. This makes it easier to challenge the norms and create room for more people to participate and engage themselves.

## EXERCISE: FOCUS ON THE NORMS

**WHY:** The purpose is to learn about how you can create more inclusion by working with norms in your association<sup>1</sup>.

**WHAT:** The exercise can be done by smaller groups like the board or a group of volunteers. You can discuss both the norms of your association and those found in smaller, more defined communities.

**HOW:** As a group, try to map the way into your association for a new member. Imagine all the steps, from the first meeting with the association to joining the community and participating actively. Think back to your way into the association:

- What steps exist?
- What limits or eases your way in?
- What norms affect the way in? In what way?



<sup>1</sup> Thanks to IGLYO's Norm Criticism Toolkit (2015) for their inspiration.

When you have gone through it all, assess individually how much the norms affect inclusion in the areas. Use a scale from 1-10:

- 1. The activities of your association or community:** Can everyone join? Are they accessible?
- 2. Your association or community's social conventions:** Do everyone feel like they can be part of the community?
- 3. Ways of participation in your association or community:** Can everyone influence your association's framework and activities?

Then, everyone shares their answers and elaborates on them: Why did you deem it to be on this level and not one or two levels lower? How can your assessment be increased by a level or two? Share your ideas and suggestions for which norms you can work with to create more inclusion.

**EVALUATION:** Did you become aware of one or more norms that you have not thought about before? Were there any differences in the norms you focused on? What norms further the community of your association? And what norms limit the community?

## **CASE:** **SUMH AND SHOW ABILITIES PUTS INCLUSION ON THE AGENDA IN UGANDA**

SUMH has supported Show Abilities Uganda in building up a strong capacity in order for Show Abilities Uganda to grow from a youth division of a larger organization to become an independent voice of a marginalized group in society.

SUMH (a Danish political umbrella organization for young people with disabilities) has been engaged in a project in Uganda since 2007. At first, the project aimed to strengthen the capabilities of their partner organization which was then a youth division of an organization for adults with disabilities. Since then, the youth organization grew to become the independent organization Show Abilities Uganda that aims to become the voice of youths, ensure meaningful involvement of young people with disabilities and initiate independent projects. From 2019 and onwards, SUMH has worked to strengthen the organization and its volunteers and to establish local chapters. Moreover, the project has worked to ensure that young people with disabilities are included in mainstream Ugandan organizations to help promote young people with disabilities as active members of society.

### **How the organizations works with inclusion**

SUMH's work focused on strengthening the youth organization. Together with Show Abilities Uganda, the work mostly consisted of workshops on rights, leadership, volunteering and advocacy. The aim was to identify young people, get their contact information and prepare them to participate.

The various workshops were adapted to the level of schooling in the district in question, a level that differs from district to district. To com-

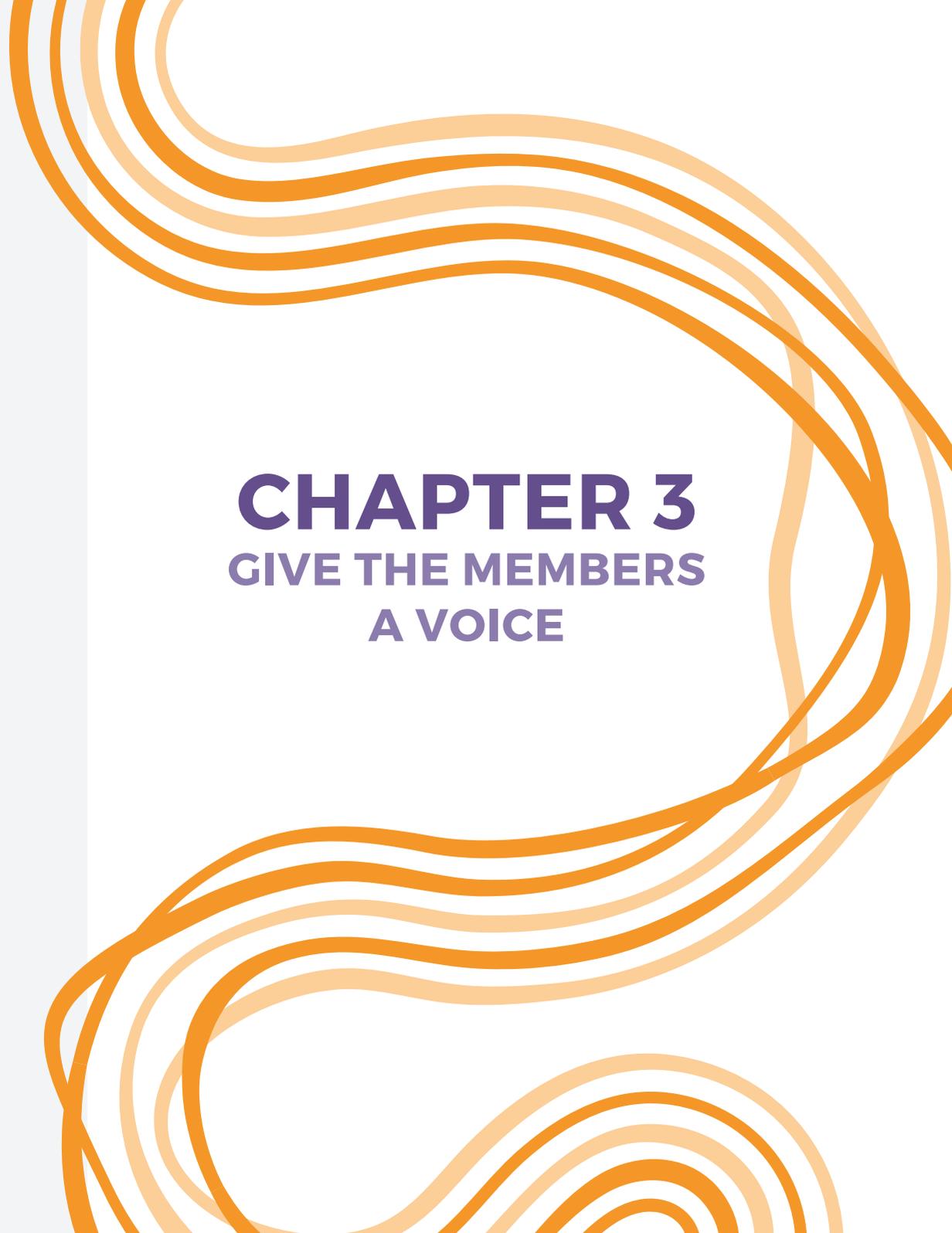
pensate, they held drama workshops where the youths were taught to do theater and to arrange a theater play for their parents and local community. This was a highly successful way of talking about inclusion that did not encounter too many taboos. SUHM also considered their own inclusion by ensuring physical accessibility, the presence of sign language translators and by reaching out to young people to invite them to the workshops.

They also worked with inclusion by gathering stories of change in the families' views of young people with disabilities: From first viewing the young people as a burden, the families came to understand that the young people with disabilities could contribute and do good in their life. The work to strengthen their perception was also expressed when Show Abilities Uganda arranged a fundraising project where they washed cars, sold cakes and held 'dinner in the dark'. Through these events, they showed that young people with disabilities also strive for a better future - and that they can easily be included in society. The project created a community for a group of youths that previously had none - and that made a huge difference.

### **Results**

SUMH has supported Show Abilities Uganda in building up a strong capacity in order for Show Abilities Uganda to grow from a youth division of a larger organization to become an independent voice of a marginalized group in society. The project strengthened inclusion, as the meeting between Danish and Ugandan youths has inspired the participants to look past their personal challenges to strive for their dreams and ambitions. It has also involved parents and caregivers as partners to a higher degree than previously.

The strengthened voice has helped Show Abilities Uganda apply for and get projects approved by funds that does not exclusively focus on disabilities. Show Abilities Uganda is now invited to participate as an expert organization when public organizations develops inclusion strategies and initiatives. This is inclusions that creates increased accessibility and better understanding and opportunities for young people with disabilities.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **GIVE THE MEMBERS A VOICE**



Young people are  
best educated in democracy  
by living in a democracy -  
with rights and obligations”

– Hal Koch, founder of DUF

## GIVE THE MEMBERS A VOICE

If democracy is a conversation, then it depends on all of us having a voice and being able to use it. Thus, a good point of departure toward a strengthened associational democracy is the members’ prerequisites for participation.

Associations give children and young people the opportunities and abilities to become good democrats by letting their voices be heard long before they can vote in elections. But what does this mean? To let your voice be heard in an association entails much more than just voting during the general assembly. It is all about daring to voice your opinion, participating in conversations on what takes place in the association, and finding common solutions to how you can help shape the association. But it is also about listening and being curious about what other people say.

At DUF, we often use the expression ‘democratic confidence’ to describe what it means to dare to take a stand and - together with other people - create change in the communities that we are part of. Building up young people’s democratic confidence is about much more than just giving them enough tools and confidence to feel ready to actively participate in democracy.

## WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE PART OF A DEMOCRACY?

It may sound simple, but to use your voice in the association requires active effort from both the members and the community.

### To learn to take your place

First, you need lots of practice, but also the courage to participate in an associational democracy. If you are not used to voicing your opinions, it may feel transgressive, which for some may mean they refrain from participating. Regardless of whether you are a new or experienced member of the association, there may be large differences between young people's democratic confidence. Some will feel it is natural to voice their opinions while others will be more reluctant. Some do it in one setting but not in another. As an association, you can do a lot to give your members the courage to have an opinion and actively voice it. (see the 'Soapbox speech' exercise on page 63).



### The association may be uncharted territory

It is difficult to contribute with qualified inputs when you are a new member. Perhaps this is the first time you are actively engaged in an association - and what does it even mean to be part of an association? You must acquire experience and get to know the association. How is the association organized? How can you influence and take responsibility for the association? As a member, you must try to learn all the new stuff, but as an association, you must help prepare new members to navigate their organization.

### "I must know you before I actively participate"

To have the courage and will to participate, you must feel safe and have the confidence to act in a given situation. When you enter a new association, you must build yourself up in these new contexts, learn new group dynamics, and get to know and navigate the social sphere. As soon as you are part of the community, it is easier to feel safe enough to contribute. However, it may be difficult to be a newcomer in an association where it feels like everyone knows each other. All communities have a certain way of interacting. Some associations have a tradition of using humor or internal jokes. This is only natural when people spend time together, but it can sometimes deter new members. If new members do not actively participate from the beginning, it may be because they need more time to settle in and get to know all of you.

"It takes a long time to get to know the association's framework, e.g., its articles of association, and when you have gotten to know the association, you get much more confident - and you dare to voice your opinions."  
- young volunteer.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- How do we greet new members? And how do we make them feel safe and welcome?
- What prerequisites exist for new members to participate? Do they have experience participating in associational activities, or is this the first time?
- How can our community influence our members' engagement in the association? Can everybody join, or are there any mechanisms of exclusion present?
- How do we prepare new members to navigate our association and democracy, so they settle in properly?

## TIPS FOR PREPARING NEW MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE

### TIP #1: Greet the new members

Ensure that you include all new members in the community. Some just plunge headlong into the association's activities from the beginning, while others require some assistance. No matter what, you should always properly greet new members to make them feel safe and welcome. Therefore, it is a good idea to define a specific procedure for welcoming new members. It is often easier to speak up if you feel safe and welcome. For this reason, speak about how you greet new members for the first time. Should you always introduce yourself if you see a new face – even though it feels uncomfortable? Could you introduce a buddy scheme where a few old members are responsible for being extra attentive toward the newest members? How do you best invite new members to join your conversations and activities?

### TIP #2: Use mentors to set an example

It may be an idea to set an example for new members. This idea is already found in many associations where it is part of its structure. For example, scout associations let you start out as a 'cub scout' and become a leader if you stay long enough. If your association is more loosely organized, you may have to clearly set your own examples. You could assign new members a mentor that can help answer questions and involve them in planning activities. From this outset, they can gradually take on more responsibility until they can be assigned their own mentee.

### TIP #3: Use intro-meetings

Associations often have their own vocabulary - technical terms and strange abbreviations related to the association's purpose that are incomprehensible for an outsider. As a new member of an association, it may be difficult to grasp the new vocabulary - and it is even more difficult to say, 'I did not understand that'. Remember to prepare new members to navigate your asso-



## THE IDEA DATABASE - CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMMUNITY

### MAKE IT EASIER TO REMEMBER EACH OTHER'S NAMES:

It is immensely important that other people take the time to learn our names. Make it easy for everyone to remember each other's names by letting them create name tags. You will only need white stickers and a set of colored pens. It may feel artificial, but it will help you learn the new members' names and get them to feel safer.

### USE ICEBREAKERS:

There are many simple, fun games to break the ice. One of the best and easiest is to 'plan a bad party'. Sit down in pairs and take a couple of minutes to plan the world's worst party. Then, present your party to the group. You will see many creative ideas. You may see a party held in a knitting museum where only dogfood is served while Fidel Castro's speeches are broadcasted. After such a presentation, it is difficult to be afraid of saying the wrong thing.

### CREATE AN OCCASION FOR MEETING UP:

End your meeting or activity with a soda in a nearby café. Another trick to include new members is to meet and eat. Sharing a meal is a way to unconsciously make us feel safer together. Cooking together is also a good way to get to know each other. Preparing food together automatically provides topics of conversation and something to do to avoid awkward silence.

ciation and explain all the internal references. Some associations create lists of abbreviations for new members; others have intro-meetings or pre-meets before activities where new members can get the necessary knowledge to actively participate. Emphasize that there are no stupid questions!

#### **TIP #4: Acknowledge that it may be difficult and that it is all right**

It can be both inspiring and intimidating to join an association full of experienced members. Many people are afraid of sounding ignorant or saying the wrong thing. As an association, it is your responsibility to challenge this culture of perfection and ensure that nobody is afraid of voicing their opinions. A way to do this is by talking about the awkwardness of being new and that is okay to feel this way. It may sound crazy, but just a little acknowledgment will go a long way. It does not have to be more complicated than saying “there is a lot of stuff to grasp for new members, so if any of us old ones say something that does not make sense, just ask.” This helps create a safe space where new members dare to ask questions and voice their opinion.

Do also get a hold of new members after meetings to ask if anything was difficult to understand or if there is anything they wish to hear more about. This will also help you learn about how new members understand your association.

#### **TIP #5: Make the space accessible**

Accessibility is about being considerate and creating equal opportunities for democratic participation. Some members may have certain needs or challenges that require specific conditions for them to participate. Barriers to participation can be about joining the association, but also when you are present. Be aware of your accessibility, so everyone can attend - and ensure that everyone feels welcome. Always ask new members if there are any considerations you should be mindful of and plan for how to accommodate them. Perhaps you should make it possible to join meetings virtually? Or perhaps you should enable wheelchair access when you plan events for the entire association? All of it signals that everyone is welcome.

#### **TIP #6: Make space for newcomers**

There are always some members who take up more space than others. It may be the ‘old’ members that are intimately familiar with the association and how it works. It may also be a close-knitted group that knows each other well, or it may be an individual that talks too much. Such members may be an expression of engagement and energy in the association. Still, it can also make it difficult for new members to get involved. For this reason, experienced members should sometimes take a step back and make space for newcomers. You can easily do this by remembering to ask others. Sometimes, it is enough just to stop up as say “[name], as you are new here, we are very interest in what you think.”

New members may view your association in a new light. It highlights the barriers that new members face when they join the community. Try to engage openly and constructively with such inputs. The purpose of mentioning them is most likely just an expression of the newcomers’ wishing to contribute to further improve the associational culture.

#### **TIP #7: Be considerate of each other’s tempo**

There are many ways to be present in a conversation. Our background and personality greatly influence how we talk and express ourselves. Specifically, how much and when we talk. Some people think while they talk and only know what to say when they say it, while other people need time to think before they talk. In an associational context, this often means that those who think and talk at the same time get more attention. If someone feels run over, talk about it, and use it to become aware of how you communicate and think. Perhaps you do it in different tempos ([see the ‘Dialogue circle’ exercise on page 65](#)).

#### **TIP #8: Talk about associational development**

As a member of an association, it may be difficult to identify when and where you can influence the association, regardless of you are an old or a new member. To contribute, it is essential that members know what goes on in the association. Talk openly about the decisions and change

processes that take place in the association. Talking helps the members notice the choices you make as an association. When associational development is articulated, it is much easier to voice your opinion and engage yourself.



## THE IDEA DATABASE

### - ARRANGE A Q&A SESSION!

You may wish to create a permanent place where both new and experienced members can ask questions, pitch ideas, and get updated on the association. This is also a great excuse to meet up with other members of the association. Here is an example of an invitation:

*Dear all,  
Much is happening in our association. Therefore, we wish to introduce our new Q&A sessions. For the rest of the year, we will arrange Q&A sessions once a month. It will be a very low-key event. We will serve a cup of coffee or tea. Then, we open the floor for an informal talk about our association's development based on the questions and ideas you may have.*

*There will always be board members or other volunteer leaders present to answer your questions. Everyone is welcome, and we appreciate all kinds of ideas and questions. We promise to take all of them seriously, even if we cannot act on them immediately.*

*Best wishes,*



## TOOLBOX

In this section, you will get concrete tools to help your association give new or more reluctant members the courage to voice their opinion and participate in your associational democracy. The toolbox includes three exercises that may help you to:

- train your democratic confidence
- get an idea of how you take up space in conversations.

It is the responsibility of more experienced members to arrange these exercises with new or less democratically experienced members.

You will also get a speed course in creating space for conversation in your meetings, e.g., by practicing facilitating meetings, and guiding and managing the conversation and the group dynamics.



## EXERCISE: DILEMMA GAME

**WHY:** Forming your own opinion is a fundamental part of being part of a democracy. However, it requires practice to form an opinion and to voice it - even when it may be uncomfortable if other people disagree. The purpose of the exercise is to train everyone in taking a stand and voicing their opinion.

**WHAT:** You will need YES and NO signs, a list of political statements (see page 61), and lots of floor space. You will also need one or more to be responsible for managing the exercise.

**REMEMBER,** it is not about your own opinion but about getting the participants to voice their own.

### HOW:

#### ➡ **STEP 1: Set the stage**

Find a room with as much floor space as possible. Put the YES and NO signs in opposite sides of the room. Now, the participants are supposed to stand up and move about the room.

#### ➡ **STEP 2: Everyone form an opinion of a statement**

Inform everyone that you will now read a political statement aloud, and that they are supposed to place themselves in the space between the YES or NO signs depending on how much they agree or disagree with the statement (see a list of political statements on the next page). All kinds of opinions are allowed if you can state your arguments in a civil tone. Inform everyone that it is perfectly fine if they change their minds during the exercise.

Read a statement aloud and give the participants time to move to their chosen sign. It may be difficult to get everyone to participate initially, but try to nudge them to participate - otherwise, let them skip the first few statements. It is all about finding a balance between everyone feeling comfortable and engaging everyone.

#### ➡ **STEP 3: Get the debate started by asking questions**

Ask those who placed themselves closest to the YES or NO sign why they stand where they do. Then ask those closest to the opposite sign. Try to get the debate going by asking different participants and getting them to talk with each other. It is important to let as many participants be heard as possible.

If everyone has placed themselves at one sign, go to the other sign and play the devil's advocate. As the devil's advocate, you could state opinions that you may not agree to provide some perspective to the debate.

#### ➡ **STEP 4: Urge everyone to take a stand**

If some participants are reluctant to choose a side even after some debate has taken place, tell them that remaining in the center is forbidden - everyone must take a stand. Now, after having heard arguments from both

### STATEMENTS FOR THE DILEMMA GAME:

Start with two or three harmless trial-statements to get everyone in on the game. For example: 'there should be more snacks at our meetings'.

1. The price of cigarettes should be raised
2. Seeking medical attention should be free of charge
3. Unemployed should receive financial support from the state
4. We should tax the things that pollute the most, like meat and air travel
5. Gender quotas should be imposed to ensure at least one-third of all board members are women
6. Public transport should be free for everyone aged 25 or less
7. The military should receive more money
8. Cars should be cheaper

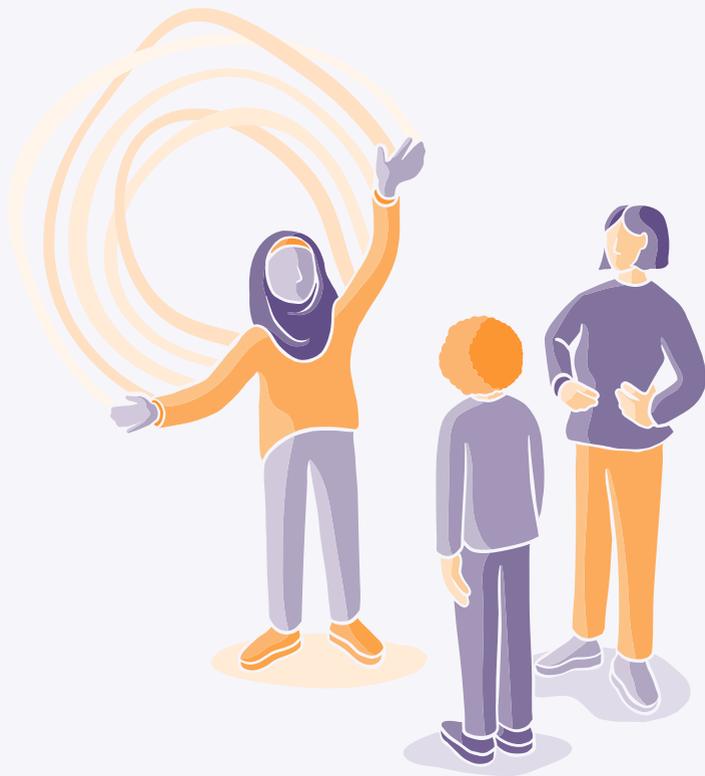
Do add other statements by asking the participant what topics they care about. It is not the actual statements that are important, but to engage everyone.

sides, they should go to those they most agree with. Having done so, ask them what arguments were most persuasive.

**TIP:** If some still insist on remaining in the middle, be curious as to why. Perhaps they have taken a stand and believe they are both for and against, which is also a valid opinion.

### 🔁 **STEP 5: Start a new round**

Start over with a new statement when everyone has voiced their opinion. Continue as long as the participants are motivated to do so.



## EXERCISE: SOAPBOX SPEECH

**WHY:** The purpose of this exercise is for many as possible to experience speaking in front of others, having an opinion, and being the one that others listen to. Democratic competencies are not just something you possess. It is like a muscle that gets stronger when you exercise it. By practicing voicing your opinion, you can build up your democratic confidence.

**WHAT:** You will need paper, pens, a soapbox, internet access, and space enough for everyone to split into smaller groups that will not disturb each other.

The soapbox speech is a great exercise if you have any new or inexperienced members of the board or in a group of volunteers.

**NOTE:** This exercise may feel uncomfortable for some, as you will make a little speech in front of others - especially if you do not possess much democratic confidence and/or do not know the other participants. It is crucial that you adapt the exercise to the participants. A way to do this is to adjust the size of the groups to make the participants feel safer. Use an icebreaker like 'plan a bad party' to warm up. [See page 55.](#)

### **HOW:**

#### 🔁 **STEP 1: Listen to a speech**

As an intro in using your voice, listen to somebody else's speech. Think about how listening to a speech makes you feel. What works well? What catches your interest? How does the speaker use pauses and other rhetorical instruments? Imagine standing on the soapbox and doing the same thing. If you need inspiration, consider listening to:

- 'I have a dream' - Martin Luther King's famous speech
- The 2008 US presidential election victory speech - Barack Obama's 'Yes we can'-speech
- The Great Debaters - The Time for Justice is Always Right Now (find it on YouTube).

## 🔗 STEP 2: Prepare your own speech

In pairs, talk about something you feel strongly about. Now, everyone has twenty minutes to write a little speech. Here are a couple of tips for constructing a good speech:

- Remember your message. Use the sentence “*I think that..., because...*” to make sure you remember to include that statement at least.
- Use yourself, tell a story of something that fits the contents of your speech. People remember a good story for a long time.

## 🔗 STEP 3: Make the speech

Find a place with enough space to put your soapbox or create a podium. Encourage the participants to make their speech in front of the others - but create a safe space where it is all right to refuse. Let everyone know that it is all right to be nervous, be stuck, or have second thoughts. Before the participants make their speeches, consider doing a power pose (stand like Superman for two minutes and feel the difference it makes). Remember to listen actively and to applaud every time someone finishes their speech.

**TIP:** Break up the groups so the participants only make their speech in front of one other participant.

## 🔗 STEP 4: Evaluation:

When everyone has made their speech, conclude the exercise and ask how everyone experienced the exercise. How did it feel to be allowed to speak publicly? How did it feel when you had to have an opinion? What learning will you keep?

## EXERCISE: THE DIALOGUE CIRCLE

**WHY:** The purpose of the exercise is to reflect on how speaking time is distributed in your association and how the way you participate in discussions may differ. Some think while they talk; others have to think before they speak. Some know exactly what to think; others use a long time to consider their thoughts on the matter before forming an opinion<sup>2</sup>.

**WHAT:** You will need paper, pens, and enough space for everyone to sit together in a circle. A neutral observer that does not participate in the exercise is also required.

It may be a good idea to do the exercise in small groups of people that often work together - perhaps the board or a permanent working group.

### HOW:

#### 🔗 STEP 1: Choose a topic

Choose the observer. The remaining participants sit down in a circle. On a piece of paper, the observer draws a circle with all the participants' names according to their position on the circle. Choose a topic that everyone can talk about. It can be related to the association, or it can be something more ordinary like “what type of food is best for dinner?”

Set a clock to 5, 10, or 15 minutes depending on much time is available.

#### 🔗 STEP 2: Talk, talk, talk

Without a moderator, talk about the chosen topic until the time runs out. Every time someone talks, the observer draws a line from the speaker to the one the speaker talks to (alternatively, just mark down whomever talks).

#### 🔗 STEP 3: Evaluation:

When the time is up, reflect on the discussion and the observer's drawings. What happened? Who talked a lot? Who did not talk as much? Did the discussion evolve into a dialogue between the two or three most

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Michael Bang Sørensen and Mikkel Risbjerg (2018) for the inspiration for this exercise.



## SPEED COURSE: MAKE SPACE FOR EVERYONE AT YOUR MEETINGS

talkative participants, or could everyone get a word in? Did you have pauses where no one spoke? Is there anything you should be aware of in your future communication?

Remember, it is not better to talk a lot than to only talk a little. It is interesting why it is so and how you can accommodate this in the future.

**NOTE:** It is not just about getting those that talk a lot to talk less – or getting those that talk little to talk more. It is instead a joint responsibility to acknowledge different ways of thinking and communicating. If you feel there is an unequal distribution in how the group members communicate, **consider facilitating** your conversations and meetings.

Another way to ensure everyone gets their say and can influence the association is to arrange meetings where everyone can feel involved and have the right conditions for participating. Therefore, you will now get a speed course in arranging good meetings where everyone will have a fair chance of voicing their opinion.

### General advice for a good meeting

- **Prepare an agenda in advance.** This gives everyone a fair chance to prepare themselves and form their opinion on the matters to be discussed.
- **Facilitate the meeting and practice being moderators.** To let everyone join the conversation, it is a good idea to facilitate the meeting. Consider letting everyone take turns being the moderator, so everyone learns how.
- **Let newcomers learn the vocabulary in advance.** Newcomers can easily end up as spectators if the conversation involves too many internal references. Use a pre-meeting to let new members get acquainted with your internal vocabulary to prepare them to participate in the meeting actively.
- **Create a safe space for asking questions.** Practice asking clarifying questions to create a culture where questions are allowed and appreciated. Most likely, it will not just be the newcomers who have questions. Consider assigning one of the more experienced members the job of asking at least three to five clarifying questions during the meeting.

- **Define the purpose.** Start the meeting by presenting the reason for the meeting and its purpose, i.e., what are we supposed to accomplish? All parts of the agenda should be thoroughly presented: Why are we talking about this? What is the intended result? How much time do we have? All of this will make it easier for the participants to offer relevant input.
- **Preserve relevant arguments.** Use a flip-over to note down what has been said to clarify when a specific perspective was brought to the table.
- **Consider using talking rounds.** It is easier to listen to each other when you know exactly when you may speak again. Instead of indicating when you wish to speak, let yourself be inspired by sociocracy and use talking rounds to let everyone be heard without being interrupted ([read more on page 125](#)).
- **Remember to take a break once in a while.** Some people will need a break occasionally. Others require a fun and energizing activity to stimulate them. Consider doing a quick energizer to include those who have difficulty sitting still. You will need strict time management to ensure the breaks do not get too long.
- **Finish with an evaluation.** Remember to do a check-out exercise where everyone checks out of the meeting by talking about what worked well and what can be improved next time.

## Practice facilitating the meetings

Some are beginners; others are more familiar with the association. Some talk and have many opinions; others prefer to be invited into the conversation or to reflect individually for a couple of minutes to prepare themselves. Members may have very different prerequisites for participating in meetings. Not everyone will actively participate if left to their own volition. If everyone is to have an equal opportunity to contribute, you must consider the unequal prerequisites for participation. You can best handle this by facilitating the meetings.

Facilitating is useful when a group has to work together toward a common goal, e.g., brainstorming for an event or making decisions. More specifically, it means that a facilitator is appointed. The facilitator will then be responsible for the meeting process without partaking in the discussion.

### The facilitator's job is to ensure that:

- the purpose of the meeting is clearly stated
- everyone has a fair chance to voice their opinion and give their inputs to the discussion - without anyone getting bullied or feel like they should remain silent
- the group is properly guided toward the purpose of the meeting by asking questions and summarizing relevant points
- the discussion remains on point
- the energy in the room is preserved by scheduling the necessary breaks, energizers, individual reflections, etc.
- they keep track of time.



## Make space by allowing for the group dynamics and composition

As a facilitator, it is a good idea to know who the participants are and how they work together.

- Be extra aware of moderating the meeting properly when newcomers are present. They need time to familiarize themselves with your forms of meeting. Set the mood and try to invite the newcomers into the conversation, so everyone feels what it is like to contribute. The right mood will also encourage newcomers and inexperienced members to participate again another time.
- Be constantly aware of who has not spoken yet, and make sure they do by asking them directly if they have anything to add or have thought about something relevant.
- Make sure nobody gets interrupted, especially not those who have not spoken yet or who have waited a long time to contribute. Only the facilitator may interrupt, and only in a friendly manner, to keep the discussion on track.
- If possible, try to have a point on the agenda where the participants can break into smaller groups. Working in smaller groups gives the meeting some variation; it also gives those who do not talk as much an opportunity to speak.

TOOLS TO:	EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS <sup>3</sup>
Allow for group dynamics and making space for everyone - including those who do not speak much.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[name], you know a lot about this subject, and that is really nice. But, right now, we need to let some of the others speak so we can hear other viewpoints.”</li> <li>• <b>Address the more silent participants:</b> “How do you see the points that we have discussed?” “What thought do you have on the matter?”</li> </ul>
Ensure progression by summarizing, making partial conclusions, and spot where the participants agree.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I think we have discussed this topic rather thoroughly now. Should we discuss this further or make a decision?”</li> <li>• “Shall we vote on this, or should I try to formulate a compromise?”</li> <li>• “Is it correctly understood that we all agree on X?”</li> <li>• “Shall we say that this is the conclusion of Y and move on to a brief discussion of Z?”</li> </ul>
Expand the conversation by asking clarifying questions and summarizing points.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Can you say a little more about Z?”</li> <li>• “Would you like to elaborate on what you understand by X?”</li> <li>• “Is it correctly understood that...?”</li> <li>• “How is X different from Y?”</li> </ul>
Promote understanding among the participants and bridge the gap between different viewpoints.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What are the common denominators of what we have agreed on so far?”</li> <li>• “Do any of you see a way to allow for both A and B at the same time?”</li> <li>• <b>Addressing individuals:</b> “What viewpoints do you feel are repeated in what the others have said so far? How does that relate to your own thoughts?”</li> <li>• “How does your viewpoint fit in with what X just said and do you have anything to add?”</li> <li>• “Have any of the others’ viewpoints or arguments given you new ideas or thoughts on the matter?”</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup>) Thank you to Ib Ravn (2005) for the inspiration.

## Informal meetings also require a facilitator

Some meetings are formally arranged on a regular basis, e.g., board meetings; others are more spontaneous or are planned on the fly, e.g., a talk in the kitchen. Having a meeting does not have to be more complicated than three volunteers gathering to plan an activity. Lots of informal meetings take place in associations when we gather to reach a common goal. We meet to coordinate, inform, make decisions, and develop new ideas. Sometimes all at once. Often, the meeting will have a predefined objective. This means you must accomplish something with the meeting. No matter how cozy a meeting may be, it may quickly turn unproductive if nobody takes responsibility for facilitating the meeting - at least just a tiny bit.

To facilitate a meeting is simply letting the meeting have a facilitator that manages the process and guides you toward your goal. There is no difference between three members meeting in the comfy sofas or the entire board talking. A facilitator is always a good way to:

- keep everyone part of the conversation
- keep track of time and keep the conversation on track
- summarize what you talked about

## Tools to keep the conversation on track

According to Ib Ravn, who researches meetings, being a facilitator means being constantly aware of whether the participants' inputs are related to the topic at hand and whether they lead toward accomplishing the goal of the meeting. Sometimes, talking time tends to get out of control. If someone gets sidetracked, **interrupt them kindly** and guide them back on track. There are many ways to do this

### 1. Acknowledge

You can say: *"This is an interesting perspective you bring up, although I will allow myself to turn the conversation back on X so that we may finish this point first."*

### 2. Clarify differences

You can say: *"I hear that you are about to bring up a new topic, which is about something other than X. I suggest we focus on X first."*

### 3. Invite back

You can say: *"I believe you have started a new topic, but first, do you have anything to add to X?"*

### 4. Park it

You can say: *"It is an important topic you bring up - let us park it for now and get back to it at the end of the meeting if we have the time."*

### 5. Redirect

You can say: *"I think we need to get back to X again. Does someone have anything to add to X?"*

### 6. Kindly but firmly reject

You can say: *"As I mentioned earlier, we are not discussing Y today. Let us get back to X."*



## THE IDEA DATABASE

### - USE HAND SIGNS TO GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

It can be difficult to manage a discussion. Although, hand signs may make the meeting more effective equal by avoiding too many repetitions and sidetracks. Here are three ways to guide the conversation using hand signs:

#### 1. SHOW AGREEMENT BY 'TWINKLING'

To twinkle is to raise both hands above the head while shaking them gently - it is American sign language for applauding. By introducing twinkling at your meetings, your members get to show their opinion without interrupting the flow of the meeting.

#### 2. ONE FINGER = A NEW POINT, TWO FINGERS = A COMMENT

Another sign that will especially help the facilitator is 'comment' and 'a new point'. If you have a comment to something that has already been said, raise two fingers. If you want to bring up a new point, raise a single finger.

#### 3. SHOW WHEN THE TALKING TIME IS GETTING OUT OF CONTROL

It can be difficult to interrupt others. Choose your own hand signs that the facilitator (and only the facilitator!) may use to signal when one's talking time is just about finished - instead of interrupting abruptly. A single raised hand is enough. You can also use an object that you raise to let the speaker know that their time is almost up.

**NOTE:** Use no more hand signs than what the facilitator can keep track of, and remember to review all the signs and their meanings so everyone agrees.

## Clearly define the meeting

To avoid talking past each other, it is important to clearly state the purpose of the meeting and how the participants are expected to contribute initially.

It may be a good idea to make sub-points for the important points on the agenda. What is the topic? How much time is allocated for the topic? What must be done? Consider marking whether the point is a:

- **Point of orientation:** Meetings will often have points such as 'Since we last met' or 'For orientation'. The purpose of these points is to ensure that everyone knows what goes on in the association.
- **Point of discussion or decision-making:** These points are used to discuss and decide on a solution and are concluded by a democratic decision-making process. These points require plenty of time to listen and discuss, so all opinions are voiced.
- **Point of development:** Here, you have time for developing ideas and brainstorming. This is where you start new projects, think big, let the association grow, and find creative solutions.
- **Point of planning:** This is where you transform dreams into reality. Tasks are delegated, activities are coordinated, budgets are fixed, and responsibilities are distributed.
- **Point of evaluation:** During an evaluation, you conclude on the above activities and reflect on the experiences gained. What went well? What did we learn? What should we do differently next time?

Remember to evaluate every single point. Even though it may feel awkward and artificial to finish up a brainstorm or a deep discussion with a summary, it is a useful way to mark its conclusion, so everyone knows that you will now move on to the next point on the agenda.

**CASE:**

## **AKBAYAN YOUTH AND DANSK SOCIALDEMOKRATISK UNGDOM HELPS PROVIDE EMPOWERMENT FOR THE FUTURE**

A strong focus on participation and empowerment give competencies that strengthen young people's future careers.

### **Background**

Through more than ten years, Dansk Socialdemokratisk Ungdom (the Social Democratic Youth of Denmark which is the youth organization for the Danish Social Democratic Party) has collaborated with the Philippine organization Akbayan Youth (the youth wing of the Akbayan Citizens' Action Party, a democratic socialist and progressive political party). Their latest project is called Youth for Sustainable Change, and its main purpose is to create regional and local chapters of Akbayan Youth. Philippines' more than 100 million citizens are spread out over more than 1000 islands which makes it difficult to reach out to all corners of the country. As Akbayan Youth is mostly centered around the capital of Manilla, they wished to establish a framework that could help make the local chapters stronger and more independent.

### **How the organizations works with involvement**

To develop competencies and allow for local ownership and leadership, Dansk Socialdemokratisk Ungdom and Akbayan Youth together with regional leaders arranged workshops where 130 local members participated. The workshops focused on making space for and providing the necessary competencies for the participants to take responsibility and leadership roles. The collaborators aimed to get the local chapters to assume responsibility for change projects such as a center for young mothers or an HIV test center. Youth leaders from Dansk Socialdemo-

kratisk Ungdom and Akbayan Youth taught organizational structure, leadership, project management and how you account for the different people you have in your organization. It was crucial for both collaborators that they could hand over as much ownership and responsibility as possible, to help ensure that the work was always done on terms set by the local chapters based on what made sense for them.

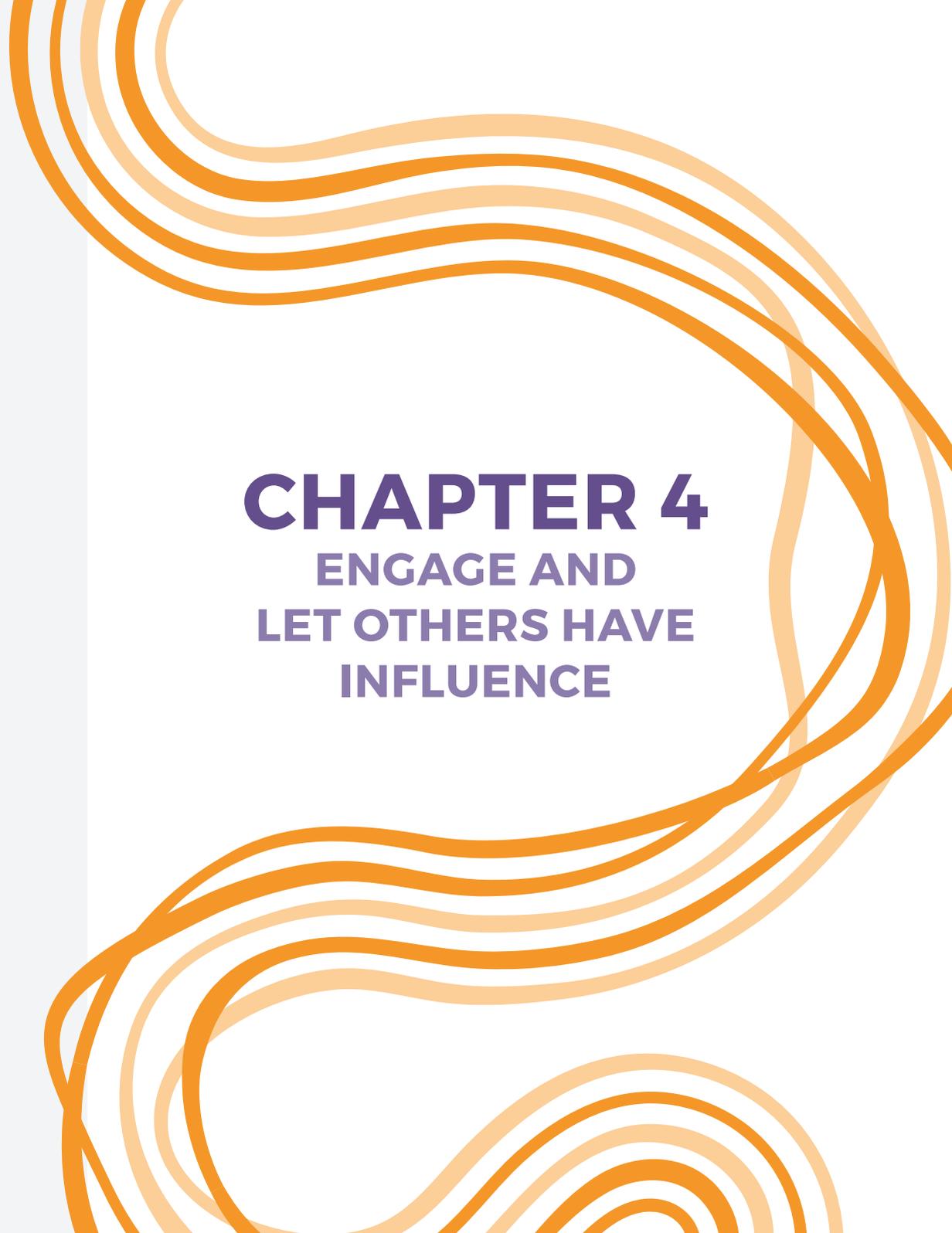
For the local project groups, it was a major step when they had to present their projects. This created some barriers and some shyness that were accommodated through suitable games and other playful activities. During the workshop, the participants were asked to build a house out of ice-lolly sticks and tape, and when exposed to 'bad weather' only the houses build on a strong foundation held strong. The point was: Your organization will remain strong if your foundation is strong.

The core feature to secure ownership and participation was a room for reflection that was established through many group conversations with consideration to the participants' needs for various tempi. These initiatives created trust which again gave the participants enough confidence to dare to speak in front of others. The room of reflection was also established through feedback and dialogue meetings, where especially mentorship meetings were used to tear down the zero-mistake culture that meant that regional leaders did not dare talk about problems due to fear of failure.

### **Results**

The Dansk Socialdemokratisk Ungdom and Akbayan Youth project kickstarted strong local projects such as a knowledge sharing-network for young mothers that helps ensure they can continue their education. This is a local initiative, supported by national resources but run locally. It shows how local communities can support and organize themselves. Dansk Socialdemokratisk Ungdom has also experienced how some of the project participants rose through the ranks and were elected to formal posts in their own organizations. The empowerment model and a strong

focus on personal participant works, as well as the tools given to the participants during their projects gave them competencies that will make a difference in their future life and carrier. That is involvement with sound perspective.

The right side of the page is decorated with several thick, wavy, orange lines that flow from the top right towards the bottom right, creating a sense of movement and energy. These lines are layered, with some appearing in front of others, and they frame the central text.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ENGAGE AND LET OTHERS HAVE INFLUENCE**



It is hard to be democratically active in the organization if you are not asked and praised for voicing your opinions.”

–young volunteer.

## ENGAGE AND LET OTHERS HAVE INFLUENCE

It is one thing to have an opinion, it is another thing altogether to have others listen to it. Members’ engagement can typically be measured in how much they are involved and can influence the community’s decisions and activities. Are you taken seriously when you put forward a suggestion? Or is it quickly rejected, ignored, or downvoted?

Involvement and co-determination are central to associational democracy. Their centrality makes it important to set aside enough time and space to ensure an equal dialogue. As an association, you need to consciously create an open and appreciative culture that allows for direct influence and actively involves and listens to the members.

### What does it mean to involve?

To involve members is many things. Among others, it is about inviting members to join the discussion on the association’s future and its new strategies and activities. You can do this with a structured process where members are integrated into the decision-making processes over an extended period of time to provide inputs, e.g., during a reorganization process. Much preparation is needed before you start such a process.



It feels like a more living organization as we have worked to involve everyone in the decision-making processes. This has been done by, e.g., having debate nights where everyone talked across the smaller social groups in the association. Here we met and talked about what you wish to accomplish with the association as a whole.”

– young volunteer.

However, involving members does not have to be rocket science. Smaller efforts also count. For example, when members can come with suggestions for the next social event, decide what should decorate the walls, or when they are asked about their opinion of a candidate for the board. In brief, involvement is bringing members on board and urging them to take responsibility and have opinions - both during the general assembly and in your daily activities. It is about listening and letting members take control, and it is about being curious about the members' perspectives and opinions.

When members feel they are taken seriously, they will be more likely to engage themselves in the association, take on more responsibility, and remain members. Hence, a positive consequence of involvement is a sense of shared commitment.

### INVOLVE YOUR MEMBERS BECAUSE IT:

- 1 ...will provide new and relevant knowledge:** Involving members may bring forth other ideas and perspectives than those already present among, e.g., the board members.
- 2 ...will lead to better decisions with more support:** Getting support for new activities, efforts, or strategies is easier when members are involved in the development and decision-making processes.
- 3 ...can increase young people's sense of ownership:** When young people feel their opinions and ideas are taken seriously, they are motivated to engage themselves further, take responsibility, and commit themselves to the community.
- 4 ...strengthens and develops youths:** Young people grow when they use their voice to influence their communities.

## TIPS FOR INVOLVING AND ENGAGE MEMBERS

It is an art form to engage many members, so everyone contributes and voices their opinion to influence the association's framework and activities. Here are a couple of tips to create better, more wide-reaching involvement.

### TIP #1: Let members influence activities

Are you a passive consumer of a community or a committed co-developer? Youth engagement increases when the association's activities are not pre-determined so that they may participate in the developing and decision-making processes. Especially informal influence during everyday activities motivates young people to participate. The most effective tool to engage members is to invite them to take on responsibility in the association and give them opportunities to make decisions and influence the framework and activities.

### TIP #2: Start small together with the young ones

Involve children early in their associational career and show them that they can also have influence. Use small opportunities to let the children influence your activities, like choosing the song you end your meeting with. The earlier you start involving children in associational democracy, the greater the chance that their engagement will grow and flourish.

### TIP #3: Explain what it means to be a member

You may easily take for granted that everyone knows their membership rights. However, it takes some effort for members to understand how to use their membership to influence the association. Some of you must set aside time to introduce, especially, new members to their options and possible ways of influence. Practice explaining how your association's activities take place in a democratic community where everyone has the right to voice their opinion and participate in the association's development. Ask

new members about their strengths and give examples of how they can involve themselves.

#### **TIP #4: Acknowledge when someone takes initiative**

When you have mustered the courage to share your idea or voice your opinion, you need someone to acknowledge your action. Many associations have experience directly praising members for their engagement to recognize their contribution and promote further contributions. If initiatives are impossible to complete right now, tell the instigator that it is impossible to do so now, but that you thank them for having the courage to speak up. Try also to guide them to other projects in the association that matches their interests.

#### **TIP #5: Make space for new ideas and dare to risk your crown jewels**

When young people try to gain influence, it is important not to meet them with a hard-to-change established system or a 'this is how we have al-



#### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

According to research, a common denominator in associations with highly engaging associational democracy is the fact that their decision-making processes are very decentralized, and their activities are only loosely defined beforehand<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, you should ask yourself:

- How do we create ways of direct influence and let our members make decisions?
- How do we ensure that decentralized decisions support the association's purpose?
- What problems can the members help solve, and where do they wish to contribute?
- How do the members wish to be invited? And do they feel invited?
- Is it clear for all members how you can influence the association?

<sup>4</sup> See 'Unge, foreninger og demokrati' by Bjarne Ibsen and Klaus Levinsen (2016).

ways done it'-attitude. Someone may previously have found a method that worked, and thus, you continue to do things this way. However, you need to open up for new members to contribute. There is a fine line between preserving what works and making space for new members to develop the framework and gain their own experience in the association.

As an engaged or 'old' volunteer, you must be aware of how others may view your ownership. You should also consider how you view new members. In some organizations, there may be internal resistance to inputs from new members. New members' opinions may not be thought to have value before they have familiarized themselves with the organization. If you meet too many barriers, it may hinder your wish to contribute. Be aware of whether old members' experience controls initiatives too tightly, and make sure to make room when others come up with new initiatives.

#### **TIP #6: Allow time to discuss challenges**

Gaining experience with associational democracy is not just a question of being part of the fun stuff. It is sometimes about contributing to solving specific problems and challenges that you may face in the association. Facing these challenges together may strengthen your sense of community. For in the end, what is it we work together for? The community! But we also work to solve the challenges associated with being in and maintaining a community. The collective identity, i.e., the feeling of being part of something greater, comes from acting together in times of crisis. You must dare to be open about the association's weaknesses and utilize the challenges you face to show your trust in your members.

"For us, it is mostly the board that handles the formal stuff. However, we try to arrange meetings where everyone can voice their opinion."  
- young volunteer.

"Instead of the members always asking the board for their opinion, the board tries to seek out the members to make it easy for the members to voice their opinions."  
- young volunteer.

**TIP #7: Seek out the member wherever they are**

Ensure that the board or the management do not close themselves off from the outside world. It is always a good idea to understand what goes on in the broader membership base. Being connected to the members helps you better represent their many opinions and interests.

Bridge the gap to the members and make it easy for them to voice their opinions by shortening their road toward influence. Consider introducing fixed hours where everyone can pop in for an open chat with the board. The board could also consider arranging 'hearing rounds' before making decisions. Venture out among your members and ask them specific questions that allow them to voice their opinions on the association's development.

**TIP #8: Ensure an open and living communication**

To form an opinion, you must know what goes on in the association. Hence, to involve is to create open and accessible communication via the channels that your members already use. Make it easy to stay updated. Instead of (or as a supplement to) a written summary that few reads and none bothers to write, try to sum up the relevant points in a short video on what was discussed and decided. This may help make your communication more living and helps your members to stay updated.

**TIP #9: Use new ways of involvement**

Sitting around a table discussing matters for hours may attract some people but also deter others. Consider if all members feel invited to engage themselves at your meetings and try out new ways to engage your

members. Some associations successfully arrange open debate nights where you discuss the association's future. For others, the solution may be to arrange a drawing workshop, a walk-and-talk, a virtual coffee meeting, or a competition. What is essential is to find a format that allows more members to contribute. Remember to think about new ways to invite members in to ensure you reach as many as possible. Perhaps you could send out hand-written invitations or a personalized text message. Or you could consider doing a video-invitation. Do not be afraid to experiment.

**TIP #10: ...and make it fun**

Remember to include small, fun energizers and icebreakers. Try to combine formal meetings with social events. For many youths, the social community is an important motivator for engaging in formal and informal associational democracy. Make room for fun and for creating cozy, social events. Moreover, consider how you get at least one social element in each



**THE IDEA DATABASE**  
- USE DIGITAL TOOLS TO INVOLVE

Involvement does not have to be a long and complicated process. Online votes on Facebook or more specialized tools like Loomio can be used to get quick feedback and let members influence specific matters.

Digital tools are an easy and accessible way to voice your opinion and contribute to the association in a limited way that suits your available time and engagement at the moment. At the same time, it also allows you to involve multiple members at once, no matter their physical location. However, you should remember to preserve formats where you meet face-to-face to enable dialogue.

of your more formal events. Make a habit of putting social initiatives in the middle of or in continuation of your meetings, general assemblies, or workshops, so you have something to look forward to. Coupling social events with other activities may also attract new types of members to your more formal events. For example, you could attract more socially oriented members that are mainly part of your community to maintain and establish strong friendships.



## TOOLBOX

It is worth considering how you can get access to your members' opinions and thoughts on your association's efforts; it is equally valuable to find out how you can involve them, not just in your local chapter but also regionally and nationally. Here are some tools to work actively with involvement. The tools include:

- a guide to when and how you can positively involve members
- a checklist that you can use before a process of involvement.

Moreover, you will get a speed course in increasing the members' motivation for contributing and taking responsibility for managing your association.

"In our association, we are four members of the national board, and we are a lot alike. Therefore, we really benefit from other's perspectives."  
- young volunteer.

## When to arrange a process of involvement?

Sometimes, it is most beneficial for the board or management to have an internal decision-making process. Other times, involving members is a useful tool to create engagement and to make better decisions. It is a good idea to involve the wider membership when decisions related to the association's activities, purpose, or members' engagement are affected.

Suppose you think it will make sense to involve the wider membership in a decision. In that case, it may be appropriate to do so using a more structured process.

### REASONS TO INVOLVE MEMBERS CAN BE TO:

- qualify decisions
- get their opinions on a concrete matter
- get new ideas and inputs
- evaluate efforts
- ensure ownership and support for decisions
- create innovation.

### AVOID USING A PROCESS OF INVOLVEMENT IF:

- a decision has already been made and cannot be changed
- there is no clearly defined purpose for the involvement
- there are not enough resources to let members get involved
- you are not ready to share control of the decision-making process
- you only intend to invite people like yourself that think alike
- you only invite very few members based on the assumption that they can represent all.

## How do you involve members?

As described earlier, involvement and engagement can be done in multiple ways, and there is no one right way to do it. It is important to consider what type of involvement fits your members or your specific case. Adapt the methods to your purpose and your resources.

Two examples of involvement are arranging open hearings and involving members in development and decision-making processes.

In **open hearings**, members are encouraged to voice their opinions of a specific matter or to provide inputs for a concrete development process in the association. The purpose of an open hearing can be to:

- learn about the members' opinions and interests and subsequently use these inputs to qualify your decisions and solutions
- get ideas and inspiration for new initiatives
- evaluate already existing initiatives to better adjust and improve them.

During **processes of involvement**, members share their opinions and participate actively in solving concrete problems, developing new initiatives, and making decisions.

## Two approaches to involvement<sup>5</sup>

	HEARING	INVOLVEMENT
<b>Purpose</b>	Members can voice their opinions and ideas, but they do not participate in the development or decision-making processes. You seek inspiration without committing yourself to specific proposals.	The members are consulted, but they also contribute actively to the development or decision-making processes. The members control what you agree upon.
<b>Formats</b>	Examples include arranging debate nights, online discussions, focus groups, advisory boards, workshops, and questionnaires. It can be about creating occasions where members can choose to participate and contribute or seeking out members to get their inputs.	Examples include workshops, design sprints, and working groups. The essential thing is to let members be co-developers and let them decide how specific initiatives should look like.
<b>Promise to your members</b>	We listen to your concerns, wishes, ideas, and recommendations, and we try to incorporate them when we work on solutions. We give feedback on how your input has affected the final decision.	We involve you in all aspects of the development and decision-making processes.  We implement your decisions.
<b>Ways of influence</b>	Indirect influence	Direct influence

5) Thanks to Jens Ulrich for the inspiration for this overview article.

	HEARING	INVOLVEMENT
<b>Advantages</b>	You can reach many members and get many inputs at once, which you can then use in the subsequent development and decision-making processes.	You can get increased support and ownership for the decisions and developments when members contribute to defining the solutions. Moreover, a process of involvement promotes dialogue between multiple parts, bringing additional viewpoints to the table while creating synergies that lead to better, more innovative solutions.
<b>Disadvantages</b>	It is difficult to realize all members' wishes. Some wishes are impossible to effectuate and others may go against each other. If the members cannot identify with the final output, you risk letting them feel like they have not been heard and that they have wasted their time.	It is difficult to involve many parties at once. More participants require more resources to facilitate the process while also making it harder to control the process.
<b>Examples of which processes that suit the two forms of involvement</b>	Suitable for making decisions that many members feel a sense of ownership toward and for processes where the result will have a large effect on members' everyday life in the association.	Suitable for smaller processes with less emotional commitment from the wider membership and where it makes sense to get expert advice from a specific part of the membership.

## THE RIGHT KIND OF INVOLVEMENT

There are several factors to consider before and after you choose to proceed with a process of involvement. Regardless of your chosen approach or method, here are some advice for ensuring a fair involvement process<sup>6</sup>:

**Involve those who will be affected:** Members should not be asked about everything. A good rule of thumb is: “If it is about them, do not do it *without* them.” Thus, if something is about the members, they should be equal partners in the discussions and decision-making process. Involving members can increase their support during the subsequent implementation phase. It will also show them that their opinions matter. It is a question of recognizing that others may be smarter than you. Typically, members have many valuable viewpoints as they see the issue from another perspective. Often, they also have a good idea of what happens locally.

**Be honest and transparent in your communication:** Transparency is crucial during processes of involvement regardless of how much you plan to involve your members. Being honest about your viewpoints will serve you best in the long run. Be clear about your expectations of those involved. Clearly stated expectations help people agree on the framework and purpose through the process. Remember to be as concrete as possible. Clear and concrete communication makes it easier to form opinions and come with qualified input. Put into words:

- Why the members are involved.
- What must be solved or decided - and why.
- What role the members have in the process. Whether the members should come up with new ideas or assess some of yours.
- Your wishes for what should be decided.
- What can be discussed or changed.
- When you will make a decision.
- When the participants may expect to see the results of their involvement.

<sup>6</sup> Thanks to Bo Vestergaard (2014) for the inspiration.

When you finish the process of involvement, clearly inform the participants how you will move on from here. Will they be involved again later? Will they be told how their inputs are used? Will you invite them to celebrate the conclusion of the process?

**Prepare the participants:** Help people prepare to participate and contribute. What knowledge do they need? How early should they be invited to schedule a time to participate and consider the topic, read background material, or discuss the matter with their base?

**Explain your choices:** Explain the reasoning behind your decisions and elaborate on the criteria for using or rejecting the members’ inputs. In this way, you take your members seriously by showing that you have spent time thoroughly considering their inputs. Simultaneously, you make the decision-making process more transparent, which may increase the support for the final decision even when some inputs were rejected. On the other hand, it may also lead to opposition and mistrust in the decision-makers if it is unclear why a decision was made or why a good idea was not included.

**What is the output?** Shortly after the process, the members should see their inputs expressed in some form of concrete output. It should be evident that their contribution has made a difference, so the time and energy they spent has not been wasted. Even if it is sometimes apparent what was used in the remaining process, remember to put it into words. At open hearings, it is vital to clearly convey the result of the participants’ efforts. Should you send a written summary to the participants that illustrates, black on white, what inputs have been used? Should you invite the participants to a meeting where you present the final result of the process?

**Always make space for influence:** Volunteers do not wish to view themselves as recipients but instead as participants. When the decision has been made, there should be something they can influence, even if it is just a minor detail. It helps to acknowledge the members and create owner-

ship. There is always something that people can help decide on - in which ways could you possibly affect your space in the association? If you choose to furnish a new hangout area, let the members decide what couches to buy, their location in the room, or the pictures on the wall.

## CHECKLIST - THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE INVITING PEOPLE IN

### FRAMEWORK

Be honest on what is possible and what is not - both to yourself and to the members. Ask yourself:

- Which inputs do we want? Should the members also be included in the final decision-making process?
- Can we do this in a constructive way? Have we set aside enough time and resources to do it?
- Have we clearly communicated to our members what the goal of the process is - and clearly defined the framework?

### SPACE

Create a safe and inclusive space that is accessible for the members.

Ask yourself:

- How do we design the process, so the members can and will involve themselves?
- What do we do if the good process is impractical for the members?
- How do we ensure that the members receive their invitations to participate?

### VOICE

Prepare the members to participate and remember to facilitate the process so everyone can speak. Ask yourself:

- Has everyone gotten the necessary information on what we are to discuss?
- Do we have a plan to create space for both the more quiet and more outspoken members?
- How do we handle any disagreements and differences among the participants?

### INFLUENCE

Make sure the members' opinions are taken seriously and acted upon when relevant. Moreover, remember to remain transparent.

Ask yourself:

- Have we clearly stated what members can and cannot influence from the beginning?
- What will we do if someone fights tenaciously for a case which we are not prioritizing?
- Are we ready to listen to the members' inputs and hand over control and work with their favored inputs?



## Practical considerations for the process of involvement

When you prepare for the process of involvement, choose who will be responsible for the process and its planning. You may also consider if you can delegate tasks to others in the community. The more people who feel a sense of ownership of the process, the more likely it is to be successful! Perhaps one knows a good energizer or a workshop exercise, while another feels like baking a cake for the break or keeping track of time during meetings.

It is also a good idea to create a script or a program beforehand. By writing down your plans, you will have an easier time figuring out your output of the process, who is responsible for what, what materials you need, and how much time is required.

Finally, it is beneficial to look toward the future implementation or execution during the process of involvement. Doing so early on is a good method for engaging people in the intended outcome of the process. It is also an advantageous time to create the working group that will implement the output (or whatever is meant to happen).

### NOTE: MAKE A REALISTIC TIMELINE.

It is a fact of life that more complex processes of involvement take time. Besides the time needed to involve people, e.g., a dialogue meeting, you need time to prepare the activity and process the participants' inputs afterward. It is better to set aside too much time, so no one is surprised about the time spent.

## SPEED COURSE: HOW TO MOTIVATE MEMBERS TO TAKE ON TASKS IN THE ASSOCIATION

Another way to involve yourself is to take on tasks and responsibilities in the association. Such involvement can include everything from buying snacks for a social event to joining the board. In any association, it is an artform to widely engage members to let everyone share responsibility for decisions and activities and not just leave it all for the board or the management.

As mentioned earlier, strengthening engagement and volunteerism in an association is closely connected with giving the members influence and ownership of the association they are part of. Achieving early engagement requires you to create possible ways for everyone to contribute, develop, plan, implement, take on roles of responsibility, etc. Moreover, it also demands openness and flexibility where your activities, tasks, and goals are not always predetermined.

### Good advice for creating co-responsibility

- **Have faith and delegate responsibility.**

As the responsible person for a task or an activity, it is easy to think, "I'll just fix this myself; it will be the quickest solution." But to delegate responsibility is to show trust and motivate individual members to engage themselves. Give the task to another and trust that they will handle it. Then, accept that the solution may not end up just like you imagined it.

"When others show confidence in you by asking if you want to contribute, you realize that you can play a major role in the association."  
- young volunteer.

- **Give specific and defined tasks.** Make it easy to engage yourself and be clear about what a task entails. Help new participants get started and support them when needed.
- **Matchmaking is everything.** Start with the members' interests: What motivates them? How much can and will they contribute with? It is all about creating the right match between the tasks and the individual member.
- **Offer new tasks continuously.** The best way to maintain and involve is to invite members to participate in more tasks that match their interests and motivation. Make sure that the tasks always evolve. If Adnan always has to manage all the technical equipment because 'Adnan is good at IT and likes to help with technical stuff,' then it limits the potential for development. Start with easy tasks that give motivation and build on that. Perhaps Adnan would like to teach volunteers?
- **Make it easy to take the initiative.** Create a structure that enables members to start up new, small projects and thereby take responsibility for the association's development.
- **Create an attractive and flexible framework.** Make it acceptable to downsize your engagement during busy periods, and try out flexible volunteering formats to engage your members (read more on the next page).
- **Ask members directly.** One of the things that really motivate you to get engaged in volunteer work is to be asked directly by others. This feels like a pat on the back, especially if it comes from someone more experienced than you.

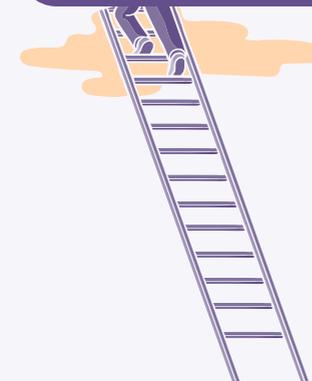
- **Nominate each other specific roles.** A more formalized way of asking people is to nominate each other when roles are assigned, e.g., for a working group.
- **Give feedback.** When members take on tasks, then they require continuous feedback on their contribution. Remember to clearly praise their results so they will feel like they have succeeded.



**NOTE:**

**EVERYONE STARTS AT THE BEGINNING**

It is all right to start small. The better a member succeeds with small tasks, the more motivated they are at getting further involved. Think about your history in the association: Where did you start, and how have you developed? Can you learn anything from your development that may be transferred to new members?



## Three flexible forms of volunteerism

**1. Micro-volunteering** is about combining small actions from many people to solve large tasks or create concrete change in society. The idea is to make it easy to volunteer. Often, this happens online. Examples of micro-volunteering are signing a petition, re-tweeting a call for action, forwarding an invitation to a demonstration, and using the association's SoMe channels to post advice for creating change. It may also include participating in a flash mob, fill out a questionnaire, or collect five pieces of trash on the way home from school. The possibilities are endless. What matters is that the tasks only take a few minutes to complete wherever the members are and on their own terms.

**2. Group-volunteering** is a concept created by a Danish Volunteer Center in Copenhagen, Denmark. It is a method to organize volunteers that account for their need for flexibility and the association's need for a stable volunteering effort. Specifically, it entails that volunteers are attached to a permanent activity as a group instead of as volunteers. The group has a joint responsibility to ensure that there are always enough volunteers to complete the chosen tasks. Collective responsibility means you sign up for or turn down tasks internally and that you step up if someone else is prevented from participating. You are obligated as a group and not individually. The method is advantageous as a springboard for new volunteers,

as it motivates them to join the community, and it creates a feeling of safety in knowing you are not alone in having responsibility for this task<sup>7</sup>.

**3. Ad hoc-working groups** are set up based on immediate needs or interests. Some associations have had luck in increasing the shared responsibility among members by creating a new struc-



ture where you create sub-committees to deal with specific tasks in the association. Ad hoc groups are a good way to take some of the load off the board. Other associations create ad hoc-working groups based on members' interests. This method allows members to delve into exactly the area they are interested in together with other like-minded members. The advantage of small, self-governing groups is that they are more engaged compared to larger groups. In small groups, you end up knowing each other better, which strengthens the sense of commitment to the community. You should always match your expectations at the beginning and use this to agree on the framework for your collaboration<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup>) Thanks to the Volunteer Center of Vesterbro, Kongens Enghave and Valby in Copenhagen for the inspiration.

## Remember to create hype about your association!

Telling stories about ‘how we are as a community’ is an effective tool to promote emotions and feelings that motivate people to act. For this reason, remember to use a strong narrative when you talk about your community. It motivates the members to take responsibility and act in unison. You maintain such a narrative by reminding people about all the awesome things that motivate them to be engaged in the association. Your narrative may be a story about how fantastic your community is - or a story about a cause you all fight for and about all your victories. Or it may be a story about everything your members learn by participating in your activities.

The Danish socio-economic company *DeltagerDanmark* (‘Participatory Denmark’) has made a guide for how to work actively with narratives as a tool to tie together individual members’ stories and create a common narrative about ‘us’<sup>8</sup>. According to DeltagerDanmark, it is worth considering:

- What signifies the story about your association or the community you are part of?
- What common values do you have?
- What common experiences, activities, or events have meaning for you?
- Are there any remarkable people that have made a difference over time?

<sup>8</sup> You can read more about it here (in Danish): [www.deltagerdanmark.dk/engager-med-historiefortaelling/](http://www.deltagerdanmark.dk/engager-med-historiefortaelling/)

## THE IDEA DATABASE - ASSOCIATIONAL HYPE

Here are a couple of specific ideas to hype your association:

- **SHOUT-OUTS:** Make some noise and draw attention to your association on social media to show how yourself and others just how *awesome* you are. Do a take-over of the association’s SoMe channels to make shout-outs, draw attention to and celebrate the volunteers’ cool efforts or inspiring personalities.
- **MEME-MAKING:** Make your own memes about your association using an online meme generator.
- **TIME CAPSULE:** Let everyone write a letter to the association that will be read in a year. In a year, you can then read the letters together and look back at the development you have gone through the last year.
- **WORD CLOUD:** Together, write a list of things you like about your association and create a word cloud out of it. Choose a theme or question and let everyone contribute with answers and reflections. In the end, you will have made a word collage that visually demonstrates some of what you love about your association. You can also make headlines like: ‘visions and dreams for the future’, ‘why I am engaged’, or ‘my best memory of the association’.
- **MAKE YOUR OWN ASSOCIATION QUIZ:** Everyone writes five questions about fun events in your association. You can use Kahoot or another online quiz tool.
- **CREATIVE PROJECTS FOR THE ASSOCIATION:** Make a collage or paint a picture to hang up where you normally meet. It could be theme-based with variations of your logo or a fun memory you have in common.

## CASE:

# YOUTH POLICY CENTER AND VENSTRES UNGDOM INCREASES VOTER TURNOUT AND POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT IN MOROCCO

An atmosphere where young people can grow, inspire each other and practice taking a political stance is created. An atmosphere in which young people get tools to find local issues that they feel strongly about.

Venstres Ungdom (the youth organization for the Danish liberal political party Venstre) collaborates with the Moroccan Youth Policy Center on creating greater engagement and better opportunities for youths in Morocco. One of the cornerstones of their collaboration is the idea to involve Moroccan youths in local and regional elections in 2021. Here, they help the youths register for the elections and understand how they can make a difference by voting. The project aims to lower the average age of political candidates by attracting younger political candidates as young candidates increases the likeliness of youths participating in elections.

### How the organizations work with involvement and influence

The organizations held workshops where they gave young candidates and campaign managers rhetorical and tactical tools to help them and their key issues gain more exposure. The workshops introduced the young candidates to the political system and helped them identify key issues, strengthen their candidacy and enhance their messaging.

Venstres Ungdom and Youth Policy Center worked with digital campaigns, recruiting in educational institutions and radio messages to get youths to involve themselves and get them down to the polling stations to register and to vote. They created info graphics that shows how you can get to your local polling station, what you should do, what you should

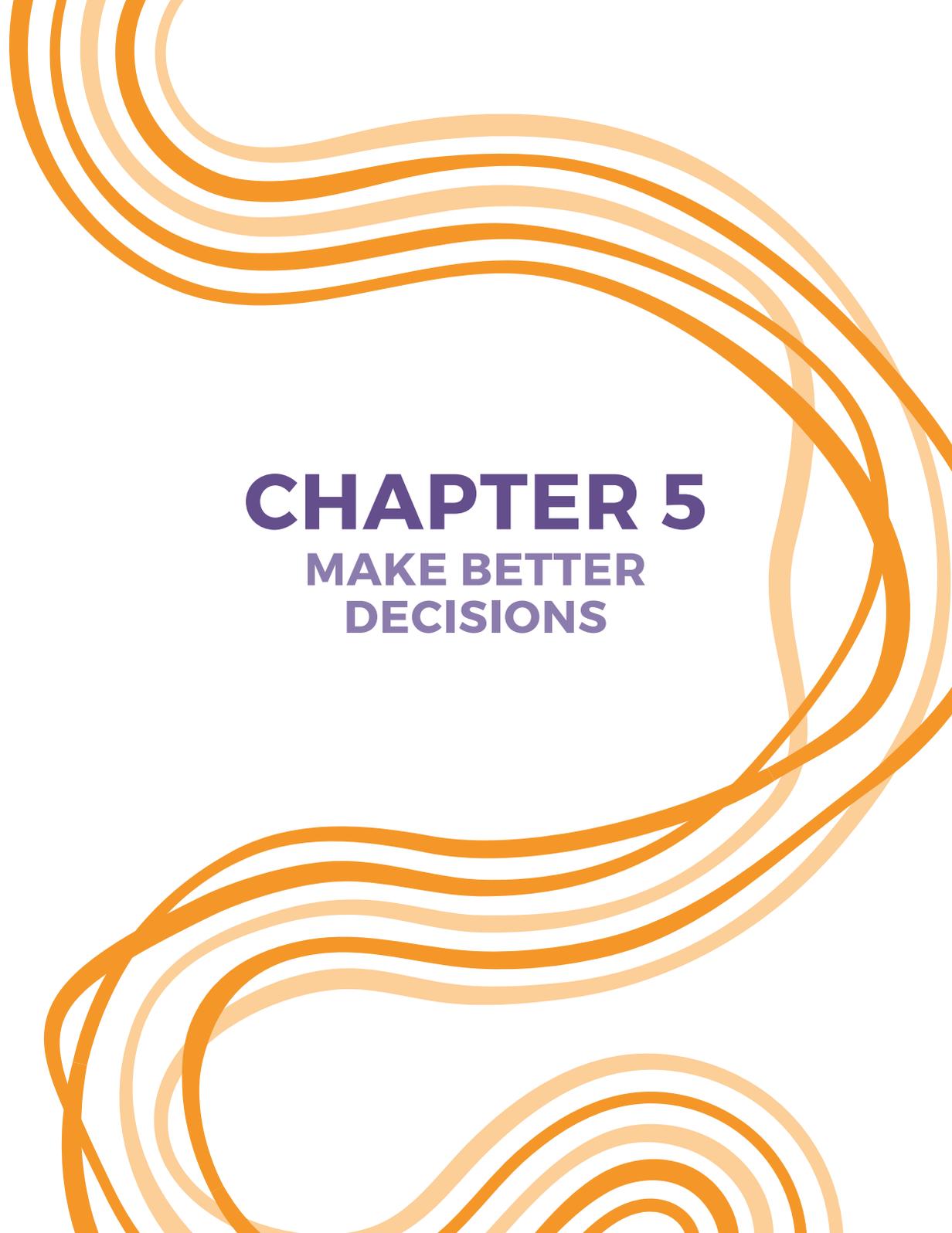
bring, how to navigate the polling station etc. The amount of interaction with the campaigns indicate that the messages really get the youths going, get them to make up their minds and to act.

The flexible framework of the individual workshops provided ownership and created involvement. Here, Venstres Ungdom used break-up exercises where the participants had to introduce themselves and how far they have come with their key issues. It is obvious that the young people excite and inspire each other - and thereby get new ideas and key issues that they may introduce to their local communities.

### Results

The project proves that when the opportunity arises, young people do wish to participate. Hence, one of Venstres Ungdom and Youth Policy Center's workshops with room for 50 participants had 650 signups.

There are plenty of other success stories, like a candidate in a local election that wished to establish a local library and who was subsequently elected. The young people have also gotten better at debating and listening, making up their minds and daring to speak up in public. In this way, they project successfully created space where young people can grow, involve themselves politically and exchange ideas across political ideologies. All of which are experiences they can use to form their own, local key issues.



# **CHAPTER 5**

## **MAKE BETTER DECISIONS**



The nature of democracy is not decided by a vote but through conversations and negotiations, and through mutual respect and understanding all of which leads to a growing understanding of holistic interest.”

– Hal Koch, founder of DUF

## MAKE BETTER DECISIONS

To be a democratic association entails continuously making joint decisions on the affairs of the association. It includes everything from small day-to-day issues to major decisions that decide your overall strategy. Then, what tools are available for this decision-making process? Some make decisions by voting and letting the majority decide; others try their best to convince the group that their proposal is the best.

There will often be many different opinions and suggested solutions for the decision you are making. To navigate a sea of inputs from many different people is an art form, and you will need a sound process to reach the right decision. Dialogue is a valuable tool in many contexts where you as an association must agree and make concrete and qualified decisions.

### **Dialogue and decision-making processes**

Making decisions together is central to any democracy. However, there are many ways to go about it. Methods for reaching decisions can include votes, negotiations, debates, and compromises, all of which aim to find joint, solutions that everyone can live with. No matter the methods, dialogue and conversational democracy can be crucial to achieve a sound process on the way to the final decision.

Dialogue can be used to help us understand each other and learn more about why people have certain opinions. By actively listening to each other and accounting for different perspectives while working on the joint solution, it is possible to increase support for the decision. In brief, dialogue can encourage mutual understanding and build relations in a way that supports the will to find the right solution.

Meanwhile, dialogue is also a way to make better decisions because we actively listen to each other and bring new ideas to the table. We also use dialogue to help identify promising possibilities and potential barriers to finding the right solution. Therefore, dialogue can contribute to making decisions be more well thought out, inclusive, and much more durable. Although, it requires that you remain open to other people's opinions and that you are willing to change your own opinions.



### DIALOGUE IS ...

- is to remain curious about each other's perspective and open for others - even when they deviate from yours
- to have an honest and persistent will to listen, ask questions, and try to understand
- to communicate on equal terms, so everyone may participate equally without consideration for their background or status
- the belief that all voices have an equal right to be heard when the minority's opinions are just as valuable as the majority's
- to learn more about other people's world views and thereby gain a more nuanced view of our mutual reality.

## TIPS FOR EASING DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

To ensure a sound process and better decisions, here are a couple of basic guidelines to follow:

### TIP #1: Make sure you talk about the same thing

Allocate enough time to properly explain the proposal or case to be discussed. Sometimes, we just assume that everyone has the same knowledge and understanding of what you are discussing. As a result, we deprioritize or forget to consider the matter at hand before voting. Problems can then arise later on when the decision is implemented because it becomes evident that not everyone understood the decision in the same way. The decision-making process can also be drawn out if the case is not clearly defined from the beginning; it happens when people see an opportunity to interpret the case based on their own agenda.

### TIP #2: Aim for a compromise - not consensus

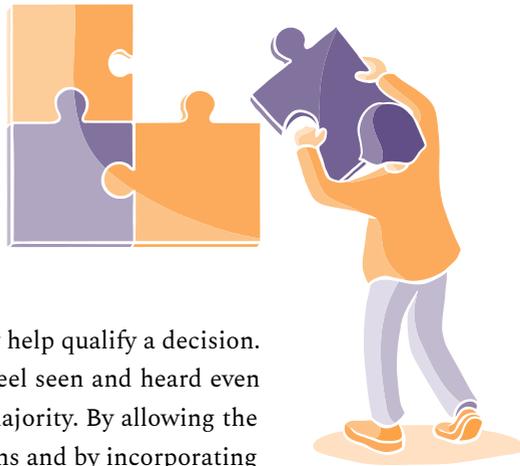
It may deter the decision-making process if you are too focused on attaining consensus. Thus, it is a good idea to practice finding compromises. This means finding an agreement where all parties relinquish some of their demands to find a joint solution. It is a misconception that we must all agree to act. Do not aim for consensus, accept that a difference of opinion (and the resulting disagreement) is inevitable in a democracy. In other words: agree to disagree. Instead of seeing disagreements as barriers, meet each other halfway. We have an easier time finding a sound compromise when we actively listen and attempt to understand our different perspectives. Any one of us may have

"Sometimes, we forget to sit down and have a conversation about what we really mean. Other times, a simple talk is enough."  
- volunteer.

the keystone needed to complete our mutual solution.

### **TIP #3: Listen to those who disagree**

Valuable knowledge can be gained by listening to the minority; knowledge that may help qualify a decision. Moreover, it is important to feel seen and heard even when you disagree with the majority. By allowing the minority to voice their opinions and by incorporating their suggestions as much as possible, you increase the subsequent support for the final decision. Permit yourself to be inspired by Deep Democracy - a method to actively use the minority's voice in decision-making processes ([see the speed course on page 150](#)).



### **TIP #4: Meet resistance with dialogue**

When one or more parties resist a proposal or try to short-circuit a decision-making process, turn to dialogue. Investigate what is at stake - is the opposition an expression of a stubborn preference or is it about something else? For example, have someone felt ignored in the process? Or does the party in question see something untenable in the idea the

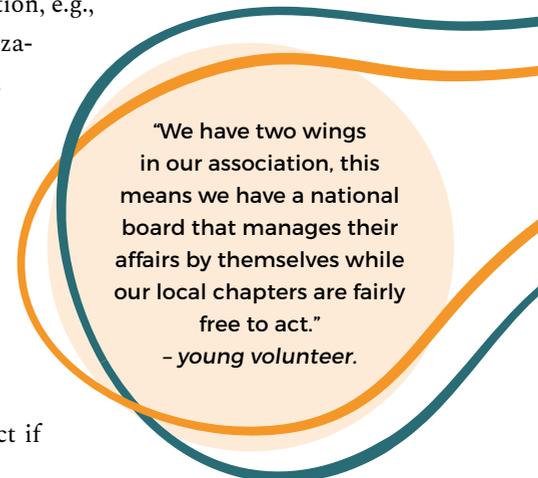


*In our association, when we were working on some internal guidelines for the entire organization, we experienced much disagreement, and the members had various key issues. To handle these issues, we used an extended decision-making process including dialogue on how to formulate some of the guidelines. Here, we made sure that all groups were considered and that some of their key issues were included. This extended process helped us formulate guidelines that all groups could accept.”*  
- young volunteer.

majority prefers? There are many possible causes and many ways to deal with them ([read more on page 128](#)).

### **TIP #5: Make room for variations**

A sound compromise may be hard to find. Fundamental differences between opposing parties in the association, e.g., a local chapter and the national organization, may exist to such an extent that a compromise seems impossible. Such a situation requires some or all to relinquish partial control to make room for other methods. You can choose a decentralized model of managing the association. Specifically, this may result in the national board only issues loose guidelines while the local chapters are free to act if they do so within the guidelines.



### **TIP #6: Consider putting it to a vote**

Sometimes, you only need a good dialogue to reach an agreement. Other times, it may be necessary to vote on the matter to reach a decision and move on while remaining friends. Some organizations find a middle road. They use dialogue processes and when these are not enough to reach a compromise, they still have the option of using votes to determine the output. Although, the minority is still protected to some extent. A two-thirds majority is required for decisions to be passed. Before a vote, an honest and open dialogue must have taken place to allow all stakeholders to voice their opinions. The dialogue is necessary to accommodate disagreements and find solutions that everyone can support or at least accept. This is an example of why it is a good idea to start with a dialogue instead of moving directly to a vote. When a subject has been exhausted, the vote will show how far you have gotten.



"We must remember to put democracy above efficiency because sometimes it may be difficult to make democratic decisions, but it creates a healthier environment and roots it in the community."  
- young volunteer.

### TIP #7: Account for unequal conditions for being heard

Do some people in your association have an easier time influencing decision-making processes than others? Often, a few, individual members will be better positioned to force their decision through. They may be more eloquent or charismatic, they may have seniority, or they may be friends with the other decision-makers. To counter this, you should always strive to communicate on

an equal basis. It may be necessary to compensate for differences in power and status by accommodating the 'weaker' part. If two members of your association - an experienced old-timer that everyone knows, and a newcomer in the association - put forward opposing proposals, the old-timer may have an easier time gaining support solely because you know him better. In such a situation, it may be more democratic to treat them differently. You could allow the newcomer more time to introduce the person in question, and you could help by giving tips for how to present the proposal.

### TIP #8: Be aware of personal relations

It happens that an association is run by a small core group who are also friends outside of the association. In such instances, the decision-making tends to move away from associational democracy and thereby making it harder for everyone else to influence the association. Also, some members may find it easier to gain support for their proposals; some disagreements may not be discussed to avoid quarreling with your friends. This is why you should be aware of how personal relations can affect the decision-making processes in your association. It does not have to be a problem, but it is always a good idea to consider how you will handle such situations if it becomes necessary.

Do also consider in which situations people may be considered incompetent. For example, can a couple sit together on a board making decisions? Or can two best friends make up the chairmanship? What is written in the rules of procedures?



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION - HOW BIASED ARE YOU?

When decisions are made, it is advisable to be impartial and fair. According to the researcher Christopher Dwyer, most of us are affected by bias. Bias leads to irrational lines of thought, which then leads to making decisions based on an invalid set of presuppositions. It can make us blind to certain arguments and result in bad decisions. Therefore, you should ask yourself: What bias affects our decisions? Here are a couple of typical biases that can influence the decision-making process:

**IN-GROUP BIAS:** We tend to favor proposals and ideas from those belonging to our own group or those like ourselves.

**OPTIMISM/PESSIMISM BIAS:** When in a good mood, we are liable to overestimate how likely a specific decision will have a positive outcome. Oppositely, we are also liable to overestimate the likeliness of a negative outcome if we are in a bad mood.

**THE CURSE OF KNOWLEDGE:** When we understand a connection or have gained certain knowledge, such understanding often becomes obvious. We quickly forget the time when we did not possess this knowledge, and just as quickly, we assume that others have the same knowledge (even when it is not the case). Making assumptions about others' knowledge can make us forgo spending time explaining our viewpoints properly.

**CONFIRMATION BIAS:** We tend to favor the proposals that confirm our existing conclusions and viewpoints.



## TOOLBOX

Here are some tools to help you improve your decision-making processes.

You will get:

- inspiration to how to level the playing field in decision-making processes
- a checklist for the good decision-making process and examples of what not to do.

You will also get a speed course in sociocratic decision-making - a method to get a more equal and efficient decision-making process.



## Level the playing field

There are many ways to make decisions and most organizations have both formal and informal procedures and practices. No method is more correct than another. What matters is that your group or association agrees on a common set of rules to guide you when making decisions, small and large. To level the playing field, it does not have to be more complicated than a **set of basic principles**. Here are a couple of examples:

- We always listen to the minority.
- We respect others' opinions even when we disagree.
- We do not judge or criticize others' opinions.
- We are ready to compromise.
- We accept that we may not get everything we wish for.
- We are ready to listen and to try to understand the counterpart's opinion.
- We make sure to have a neutral facilitator to guide us when making difficult or important decisions.

Together, find the principles that should guide your association. Remember to help everyone get familiar with your principles to avoid doubts about how decisions should be made. Do also revise your principles regularly so everyone gets a chance to get familiar with them and perhaps contribute with new ones.

## CHECKLIST - THE GOOD DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Here is some advice for handling a decision-making process before, during, and after making the decision. You can use the advice if you need a sound decision-making process.

### Before:

- Set aside plenty of time and consider one decision at a time.
- Make it clear what the decision is about.
- Prepare everyone to help them participate in the discussion by giving them all the necessary information.
- Create a transparent decision-making process and agree beforehand on how you will make the final decision.
- Appoint a facilitator to maintain the overview and keep the dialogue on track. It is also the facilitator's job to notice where you all agree and to promote understanding across all the participants and bridge the different viewpoints ([get inspiration on page 71](#)).

### During:

- Ensure that all relevant perspectives are represented and avoid too much 'groupthink'. Groupthink is when unity and consensus trump people's desire to present opposing viewpoints, criticize an argument, or express unpopular opinions. Prevent this by starting the discussion in smaller groups all working on the same issue. Then, explore the similarities and differences between the proposed solutions ([see the 'Deep Democracy' explanation on page 150](#)).
- Avoid talking about proposals and ideas as if they belong to someone. By falling in love with our own input, we make it harder to remain open for others'.
- Try to accommodate the minority so everyone feels like they have been seen and heard, and so everyone can feel ownership of the decision.

- Handle any opposition using dialogue and exploring the cause of the opposition ([read more on page 144](#)).
- Be certain that everyone has had the opportunity to voice their opinion before you make the decision.
- Prioritize dialogue and compromise, and avoid letting the majority use a simple vote to force through their viewpoints.

### After:

- Always summarize what was decided.
- If the decision affects the rest of the association, inform them what was decided and why.
- Let members react to the decision and express their worry if they are dissatisfied with anything. Be open to their input.

"You often believe the vote itself is the most important - and this hurts the reputation of democracy. Just by decided by a vote, a decision is unquestionable. Democratically, everything is fine. However, it is not that easy."  
- Hal Koch, founder of DUF.

## WHAT NOT TO DO IN A DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Many things may challenge a democratic decision-making process. Here are a couple of situations to avoid:

**TYRANNY OF THE MAJORITY:** "The majority is always right." Just because many people hold the same opinion, it does not make their opinion more true or correct. It is easy to win a vote when you are part of the majority, but in a democracy, we are obligated to listen and talk with the minority. A 25% minority is still a quarter of the association, and if you systematically discard all minority viewpoints, you will end up excluding most of the members. To avoid this, remember that dialogue is a prerequisite for good decision-making processes.

**INFLEXIBLE DEMOCRACY:** "When a decision has been made, it cannot be changed." In politics, decisions are often almost impossible to change when made. Luckily, associational democracy is more flexible. Something unexpected may happen: the chairperson steps down, the local community has other requirements, or you simply discover that you did not make the right decision. Remember that democracy is a continuous conversation. No decision is sacred - not even a democratic decision. You must remain open for a continued debate and recognize the need to adjust decisions based on new demands.

**PSEUDO DEMOCRACY:** "The decision is made beforehand." In some cases, it happens that the board has already made an unofficial decision beforehand. You may still choose to run a process of involvement that appears to let members get influence, even though the decision has already been made. Pseudo democracy is a risk when decisions are made before everyone gets a chance to influence the decision-making process.

## Methods to make decisions

There are many ways to move from A to B in a decision-making process. Always adapt the method to the individual decision. First, consider if a decision requires a more extensive process. Test the waters and feel the mood before you start - perhaps the decision is straightforward. Too many processes may extinguish the spark in your members. This is also true in the many small and less 'dangerous' decisions on practical matters you make every day. A quick conversation may be enough to make the right decision.

For **important or difficult decisions**, it is a good idea to follow a more structured process where you set aside enough time and choose an appropriate procedure for how the decision should be approached. It is also a good idea to team up with a neutral party who can act as a moderator and guide you through the decision-making process. Such a facilitator can help ensure that everyone is properly involved and that you avoid miscommunication.

There are many concrete methods to improve your decision-making process. On page 124, you get a quick introduction to sociocratic decision-making, and later in the book, you get a speed course in Deep Democracy. The methods have different advantages, and you can choose just to borrow some features from each method depending on what makes sense for you.



## SPEED COURSE: SOCIOCRATIC DECISION-MAKING

Sociocratic decision-making is a method to efficiently make decisions where everyone is heard. It focuses on compromises, not consensus. The method can be traced back to Gerard Endenburg.

**WHEN TO USE IT:** You can use the method during board meetings or in project groups where you try to find solutions that all should be able to accept without spending too much time on making decisions.

**ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS:** Sociocratic decision-making is a suitable format to promote a quick(er) and more equal decision-making process. The method works best in small groups where everyone may be heard without taking too much time. Sociocracy also requires that someone is willing to facilitate the process.

The method is built on three principles.

### ➔ **THE FIRST PRINCIPLE: Consent is not the same as consensus**

The core principle of a sociocratic decision-making process is consent. In sociocracy, consent is defined as ‘the lack of objections’. When making decisions through consent, you do not focus on “what is your preferred option?”, but instead “what option can you tolerate?” We all have preferences for certain solutions, but we also have some that we may just accept. It may not be our first choice, but we can support it. On the other hand, we also have deal-breakers - something we cannot accept under any circumstances. The reasoning behind making decisions through consent is to find a common solution that everyone finds acceptable instead of a solution that fits perfectly for some and not at all for the rest. The goal is not to agree 100% but to get everyone to agree on a suggestion. Thus, sociocracy is an alternative to majority or consensus decisions.

### ➔ **THE SECOND PRINCIPLE: Talking rounds gets everyone involved**

Instead of indicating when you wish to speak, you use talking rounds in sociocracy to create equal conditions for participation. This means that everyone – one by one – gets a chance to share their input. Other participants are not allowed to interrupt or comment. Talking rounds is a fairer way to let everyone speak. It works well when trying to involve newcomers. It is also easier to listen to each other when you know exactly when you may speak again.

### ➔ **THE THIRD PRINCIPLE: Responsibilities and roles are connected**

All sociocratic decision-making process requires a moderator to manage the talking rounds. The moderator’s role is to ensure the meetings remain clear and productive by presenting and preserving the purpose and the frame of the meeting. Other roles include a **meeting secretary** that collects input on a flip-over during the meeting. At the end of the meeting, one or more **project managers** are typically appointed to carry out decisions and follow up on them. The group is responsible for defining other roles ad hoc, e.g., you may need a purchaser, a communication manager, an accountant, etc.

## Procedures in a sociocracy

Consent guides the decision making<sup>9</sup>. Different procedures can be used to make decisions through consent, but this book focuses on the procedure where a proposal has been put forward in advance.

### ➡ STEP 1: Round of introduction

Start by introducing the proposal to be discussed. Do not interrupt the introduction. Set aside enough time for all participants to grasp the matter so everyone is on the same page. Otherwise, you end up wasting a lot of time. Be clear about the purpose of the session. What will happen? Will you explore alternatives together? Will you expand on the proposal to improve it? Will you end up making a decision?

#### TIPS:

- Start by checking in to tune into each other by answering: Why am I here? What are my primary concerns?
- Before the meeting, prepare a proposal and forward relevant information (the background for the proposal, previous considerations, advantages, and disadvantages, what is possible and what is not, etc.) to allow everyone a fair chance to make up their mind.

### ➡ STEP 2: Round of clarification

Next, the participant can ask clarifying questions if there is something they do not understand or if they desire further clarification. The participants may only ask one question before you move on to the next participant. Continue until all questions have been asked. Skip no one, but participants can pass or say, “*I have no further questions.*” You may only ask questions, not comment or criticize the proposal. Neither is it possible to put forward other proposals. The purpose is solely to ensure everyone understands the proposal.

<sup>9</sup> In a sociocracy, it is acceptable to use any kind of procedure for decision making if it has been consented to beforehand by everyone. For example, it is possible to use delegation or majority decisions if consent has been given to do so.

### ➡ STEP 3: Reaction round

Do a single round where the participants can share their opinions of the proposal. The focus should be on the immediate reactions, feelings, and considerations (e.g., “*I like that...*” or “*I worry that...*”). Comments must be directed at the proposal, not others’ reactions. Add another round if necessary. But do not spend too much time on it. It is often better to save time for later when the participants can suggest adjustments to the proposal.

### ➡ STEP 4: Objection round

During this round, the proposal is discussed in a reasoned manner. First, everyone is asked if they can accept the decision (yes or no). One by one, the participants indicate whether they consent to the proposal. Sometimes, it is possible to make a joint decision at this point. However, it is perfectly possible for someone to object to the proposal. Here, the facilitator tries to ascertain the reason behind the objection. The participant may answer: “*I am concerned that too many people are needed to plan an entire weekend for the volunteers. But I will accept it if we start with a one-day event. If this goes as planned, we can do a weekend event next year.*” If the objection is reasonable and fair, you attempt to include it in the proposal. The round continues until all objections have been raised.

**NOTE:** To object to a proposal is more than just disliking it. By objecting, you indicate that you worry that the group may not accomplish its goal if you choose to move on with the proposal. In other words, an objection must be qualified, significant, and focused on achieving the best possible joint solution not founded on personal preferences.

There are many ways to accommodate objects and resistance to a proposal (see the next page for a list of strategies).

## STEP 5: Round of consent

Use this round to make a decision. The decision is made when all objections are incorporated in the final proposal and when everyone is willing to accept it. Not everyone must have their preferences included, but you must address all objections.

**TIP:** Consider including a round of evaluation at the end. This is especially useful the first few times you use this method: How was it? What went well? Where should we practice some more?

### STRATEGIES TO HANDLE RESISTANCE IN A DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

#### UNDERSTAND WHAT THE RESISTANCE IS ABOUT

- Is it an expression of a personal preference or an actual worry about the quality of the decision?

#### MAKE ADJUSTMENTS:

- Adjust the content: "We will try to accommodate your concern and adjust the content of the proposal."
- Adjust the time frame: "We will trial some features for a short time and then evaluate it - if it does not work, we will stop."
- Use another point of departure: The resistance may be because someone cannot accept the basic principle of the proposal. It is difficult to agree on where an event should be held if you are unsure whether the event is advisable in the first place.

#### PUT THE DECISION ON HOLD AND SEEK OUT KNOWLEDGE:

- Step out of the process and investigate the reasons behind the resistance. Postponing the decision-making process may in itself reduce the resistance. Some participants may feel a need to do some research or give the proposal another thought.
- Seek expert knowledge. Invite experts in to help you learn more about the proposal.
- If the resistance is an expression of a more fundamental conflict, consider asking for outside help from DUF or another party.

## CASE: CREEDD AND SILBA ESTABLISHES AN ASSOCIATIONAL STRUCTURE IN A YOUTH CENTER IN MOLDOVA

During democratic processes, you cannot have decisions made beforehand as this will turn democracy and the democratic conversation into a pseudo-democracy.

In 2016, SILBA (a Danish cross-political non-governmental youth organization) participated in Explore Moldova, a course started by DUF – the Danish Youth Council. Subsequently, SILBA also participated in several partner identification processes, and here, they found their partner, CREEDD. At first, their project was about establishing youth or student councils at seven different schools in Moldova's second-largest city, Bălți. The project aimed to change a culture where young people move as soon as they turn 18 - and instead motivate and engage them to change the society they live in instead of moving elsewhere. This led to a partnership project aiming to build a youth center where a youth board manages the activities.

#### How the organizations worked with democracy

To create engagement and motivation for joining the board, it was crucial to figure out what motivated the youths. The organizations started in the local schools where they held several micro democracy-workshops. The micro democracy-workshops resulted in student councils in ten schools. Later, a youth center, administered by a youth board, was established as the students wished to separate themselves from the schools concerning facilities, materials and administration.

While establishing the youth board, the focus has been on ensuring equal participation and inclusion. If one or more participants were not able to

speak up due to other participants being dominating, this was dealt with to give everyone equal opportunity to participate. Conversational inclusion is a key issue, and it is ensured by, e.g., agreeing on letting everyone be heard before discussing a subject. The board also used round table discussions where everyone can speak up one at a time, and they practiced arguing by letting everyone taking a stance without speaking with each other before discussing the subject in plenum. This ensures decisions are not dependent on who talked with who. SILBA helped the board clarify when a decision had to be made and when a topic was just up for debate; they also ensured that enough time was scheduled for each point on the agenda and that proper minutes was taken. All of this was done to let everyone have equal opportunities to access the conversation.

### Results

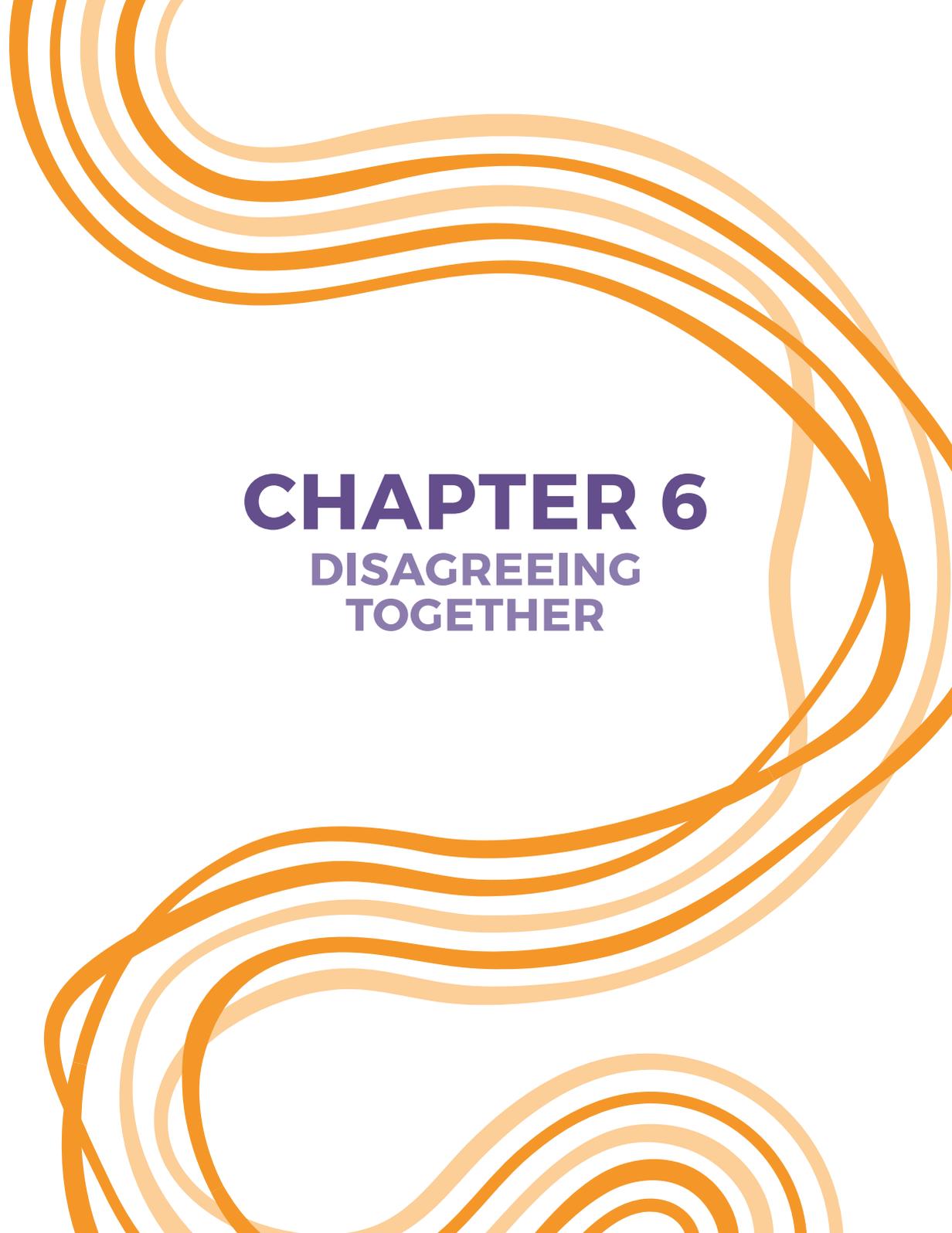
With this project, SILBA and CREEDD strengthened the basic understanding of how a good democracy works, and they helped create well-run internal democratic processes in a youth center. A part of the success became visible during the establishing of the youth center when the local youths chose not to have a chairperson but instead to create an organization with a flat hierarchical structure where everyone has an equal say in matters.

In 2021, the Moldavian youths held a democratically led general assembly for the first time - an assemble they planned and managed themselves. The youths also planned and executed a concept named 'school of politics' as an activity in their center; a center that with 70 active members and 400 users sees heavy use. The youth center is so popular that SILBA has been contacted by four other youth centers in nearby regions who also wish to collaborate with them on implementing youth to youth principles. Finally, participation in the youth center has exploded, and the general assembly saw 40 young people run for the 11 seats on the board.

That is engagement and democratic participation in practice.

## READ MORE...

- If you are interested in improving your dialogue skills, take a look at *The Dialogue Handbook - the art of conducting a dialogue and facilitating dialogue workshops*. It is filled with exercises and tools to set the framework for a good dialogue.
- If you have become hooked on sociocracy, check out the YouTube channel *Sociocracy For All*. Here, you will find lots of small demonstrations and inspiring videos that will teach you about sociocracy.
- If you want to learn more about the many types of bias that affects us when we make decisions, read Christopher Dwyer's article *12 Common Biases That Affect How We Make Everyday Decisions*: [www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/thoughts-thinking/201809/12-common-biases-affect-how-we-make-everyday-decisions](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/thoughts-thinking/201809/12-common-biases-affect-how-we-make-everyday-decisions)



# **CHAPTER 6**

## **DISAGREEING TOGETHER**



When two, three, or more people - perhaps an entire population - must decide their future or determine their laws, you can be reasonably sure there will be disagreement.

Humans are different, live in different circumstances, and have different interests. Therefore, they will also judge differently and have different wishes. Conflicts will arise, large and small. Still, the decision must be made, and the law must be determined. So, you need to find a solution to the conflict. There are, more or less, two ways to find a solution:

1) You can fight about it and let the strong-willed decide; (...) 2) you can talk about it and thereby use conversation to illuminate the conflict. Here, the parties strive to use conversation to achieve a more right and fair understanding of the source of the conflict.

This is democracy.”

– Hal Koch, founder of DUF

## DISAGREEING TOGETHER

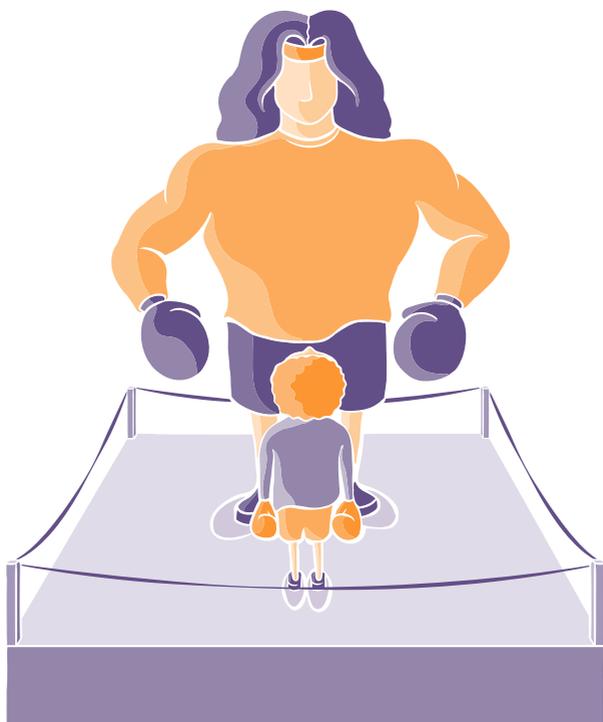
Few people like to disagree. This is why it makes sense to avoid such circumstances. Although, it is healthy to be able to disagree, it is fundamental for a democracy to have many, opposing opinions, and that you respect each other's views and try to compromise. In practice, this is not easy, and it may sometimes lead to conflict. So, how do you work together, and how do you preserve the community while disagreeing? And how do you react when disagreement turns to conflict? You can use this chapter to learn about the answers to these questions.

### Sources of disagreement and conflict

There are many things you can disagree on. Perhaps you have different ambitions for your association, or perhaps you meet other members whose opinions, worldviews, and values are fundamentally different from your own.

### Disagreement on values or opinions

Some of what is special about life in an association is the focus on identity and values. Many associations are filled with youths full of passion; they are devoted to a cause, the community, the activities, or something completely different. Therefore, the room is often fraught with emotions. When emotions are running wild, you will experience tense situations no matter how much you try to deescalate the situation. Often, this indicates that the members *really engage themselves in the association and the cause*. But it can also complicate the way act together - especially if you use your energy fighting each other.



Disagreements become especially visible when you talk with people, exchange opinions, or make important decisions together. This is where we learn about each other's values, identities, and opinions. Ergo, it is here you spot contrasts to yourself. It can be exciting to learn about other people but also frustrating to meet opinions and values that go against your own. This can easily get us to challenge the other party or let us feel challenged.

### Practical and specific disagreements

Problems can also arise if an association, especially a national organization, is divided on specific topics. Such division can lead to disagreements on the fundamental parts of the association. For example, a political association that specifically is not a partisan organization, but where par-

tisan interests to some extent become a central divide that creates disagreement. When you are a large organization, geographical differences can quickly lead to differences of opinion. Among other things, there can be a lot of variation in the work and opinions of local chapters across country and city, which can create dividing lines in the way the organization's purpose is interpreted and implemented. Ultimately, it may cause trouble when you try to set a general direction for the association as a whole.

Also, on a local level, disagreements may arise. Locally, disagreements are often about smaller and more practical matters, such as whether alcohol should be allowed at an event or if you should support an external event.

### Personal conflicts

Other times, conflicts are less about disagreeing about a specific case and more about what went wrong between two parties. Perhaps you have different temperaments or perhaps you get triggered by the other person's personality. Your collaboration may have gone off track due to miscommunication or you may have different (and unspoken) expectations of one another. Perhaps you fell out over a small, silly thing that suddenly became a big thing. Personal conflicts can also arise when you *think* you are talking about the same thing, but in reality, you are talking past each other. The more we experience not being listened to and understood, the louder we try to advocate for our own opinions. This can cause tempers to flare in the end.

## TIPS FOR MANAGING DISAGREEMENT

There is much you can do to be better at disagreeing together and working together despite differences. Here are a couple of tips:

### TIP #1: It is not dangerous to disagree

In a diverse world where people of many opinions, values, and interests live side by side, it is a good thing when a community can accommodate various opinions and perspectives. In fact, disagreements are necessary to help you evolve as a member and as a community. We learn through disagreements when we dare to explore them constructively. Disagreements should not always be managed and dealt with, sometimes they should instead be accommodated. Do this by creating a space where disagreements are seen as a natural state that can exist within a community. This will help people bring up new viewpoints and listen to other people's perspectives. You can practice accommodating disagreements in your association by meeting them with openness and curiosity. If someone opposes the consensus of your association, try allowing it to exist and make space for it instead of arguing against it or ignoring it.

### TIP #2: Use dialogue

Dialogue is a unique way to communicate where all parties try their best to ensure mutual understanding by actively listening, asking questions, and remaining curious about each other's viewpoints. Handling disagreements can be difficult, but it is a natural part of any associational democracy. When disagreements are handled by dialogue and openness, they do not have to evolve

into conflicts. Even when conflicts arise, they can be met in a way that fosters development rather than dismantling, stagnation, and frustration.



"Democracy is a gentle way to disagree."  
– K.E. Løgstrup,  
Danish theologian  
and philosopher.



Talking matters.

Sometimes, a conversation is enough. Talking to other people is an achievement in itself. Meeting up, having a good time, eating, and talking together actually have value. It is all about creating relations. It breaks down people's preconceptions of how people are and you as an organization is."

– young volunteer.

Many associations have spent time and resources on a process of open conversation with great success. This allows for dialogue in a way that helps you find the core of the disagreement by finding a solution that everyone feels accommodated or listened to. It may help prevent disagreements from escalating into conflicts and make decisions more thought out, inclusive, and sustainable. Remember that the way we approach a meeting or a decision-making process has immense significance. Do we want to fight for our cause? Or do we want to have a dialogue and understand each other? Are we open to change our opinions during the process? Dialogue only works when people are motivated to use it.

### TIP #3: Use active listening

Being curious about how other people understand the world is a crucial part of any democracy. Likewise, exploring other people's perspectives will help prevent and manage conflicts and disagreements, as it allows you to find out whether you talk about the same thing or whether you misinterpret each other. You may discover that you agree, more or less, when you find the underlying cause of your issue. By actively listening, you set aside your own opinions and associations while you concentrate on understanding what the other party says. You refrain from voicing your own opinions. Instead, you ask exploratory questions to investigate what you do not understand, and you use words and actions to show that you listen (see the 'Active listening - ABC-dialogue' exercise on page 146).



In our association, we disagreed on how large a role religion should have in the association. We were faced with a situation where two parties had very strong and opposite opinions, and that they would both leave the association if the other party won. The situation was solved through a process of dialogue where both viewpoints were voiced, and both parties could properly explain their opinions. At first, it led to a better understanding between the two parties, but it also proved that their disagreements were smaller than previously believed.

Based on this process, they made a compromise where religion could be included in the association's work, but where it would not get a central position as that would have excluded part of our members."

- young volunteer.

**TIP #4: Spot the good or the bad discussion**

Dialogue is a part of democracy, but so is discussion, argumentation, and negotiation. It is impossible to avoid discussing with or trying to persuade others of your opinions if you strongly believe in a cause - or if you strongly disagree with others. We often use it in negotiations where the goal is to find solutions, make decisions, or agree in order to move on. Therefore, we must be aware of when our discussions are constructive and when they are destructive to preserve our community. Especially in an associational democracy where a multitude of opinions, values, feelings, and interests are often present. The way we discuss has significance for our time together and for how we can solve problems and make decisions. Define a common set of rules for your dialogue and try to remain constructive when you discuss important matters or make decisions.

Get a feel for each other in discussions and be ready to tone your arguments down a bit or to make room for others in the discussion if you face a newcomer. Some people get a kick out of discussions, for others, it may be uncomfortable.

DESTRUCTIVE DISCUSSION	CONSTRUCTIVE DISCUSSION
You seek to find weaknesses in your counterpart's arguments.	You seek to find strengths in your counterpart's arguments.
You challenge and distance yourself from the counterpart's opinions.	You assume that many different people each hold a part of a sustainable solution.
You try to prove that the counterpart is wrong.	You try to work together and find common ground.
You focus solely on your own beliefs.	You try not to judge others for their beliefs.
The goal is to win.	The goal is to find common ground on which you act and create long-term solutions.
You listen to identify errors and counter-arguments.	You listen to understand others' arguments.
You defend your suppositions as if it is the sole truth.	You get insights into each other's assumptions.
You defend your original proposal, and the goal is for your proposal to win over all the other proposals.	You are willing to improve and consider proposals to find the best possible solution <sup>10</sup> .

**TIP #5: Deal with conflicts immediately**

Conflicts arise when disagreements are not met with openness and dialogue. If disagreements escalate into conflicts, it is important to react and talk about them to prevent them from escalating further. Ignoring conflicts often leads to more problems. Therefore, it is important to deal with them (read more on page 147).

<sup>10</sup>) Thanks to Sandra S. Hodges (2009) for the inspiration for the overview.

### **TIP #6: Talk about your disagreements and evaluate**

When you have managed a disagreement or a conflict, remember to talk about it afterward. It may be tempting to forget the conflict and avoid talking about it. But it is important to learn from the experience. Sit down and review what happened. Ask, “what was it that helped us find a solution?”, “what tools did we use, and can we use them again another time?”, “why did we end up with a conflict, and what can we do better next time a conflict arises?”

### **TIP #7: Make room for conversation - also when there is no conflict**

The last tip, and perhaps most obvious one, is to remember to talk together. Encourage conversations that have no other purpose than to get familiar with one another. The social aspect is essential to prevent conflicts and ensure unity in your association. We are often more willing to listen when we have taken the time to get to learn from one another. Likewise, it is in conversation that we practice accommodating and understanding differences, listening actively, and training our empathy.



## **THE IDEA DATABASE** **- START A CONVERSATION CLUB**

There are many things you can do to make space for dialogue. Try arranging a conversation club. A conversation club is a fun and efficient method of starting conversations between people who are not necessarily alike. The concept of a conversation club is that one or more hosts mix the participants and poses them thought-provoking questions to get the conversation going on new and unexpected topics.



## **THE IDEA DATABASE** **- (VIRTUAL) COZINESS AND COMMUNITY**

It is nice to be together and create something together even though you are far apart. Remember the social aspect. It strengthens the unity in your association. Here are some ideas for creating small, fun co-creation projects online:

- **THE SPOTIFY PLAYLIST:** Make a shared Spotify playlist with all the songs that fit your association. Then, at an agreed-upon time, you can all listen to the playlist (during a so-called ‘listening party’).
- **COMPETITION:** Everyone gets a task. You have one hour to complete it before you meet up again to show your solutions.
- **GUESSING GAME:** As a group, log on Zoom, Teams, or whatever you use. Agree on a category, like ‘famous people’ or ‘things you find in nature’. Write down a lot of notes with things or people from the category. Divide into teams and hold a mime competition between the teams.
- **CHESS:** Play an online game of chess.
- **TWO LIES AND A TRUTH:** Get to know your buddies in the association. Everyone writes down two lies and a truth about themselves. For example, 1) I have never eaten cheese, 2) I can do a handstand for one minute, and 3) I have never learned to swim. Then, you must all guess which facts are true and which are false.
- **TELL A STORY:** In a group video chat, you can tell a story together by taking turns narrating the story. You can include challenges such as including three words you must use etc.
- **PARTY SONG:** Choose a simple and well-known melody. You each write a verse for a joint song. In the end, you will have made a complete song that you can sing anywhere you like.



## TOOLBOX

Remember that democracy *is not* censoring other people that you disagree with, and neither is it excluding others because you disagree. To strengthen the collaboration in your association across differences, here are a couple of tools and exercises to:

- work with your own and others' resistance
- be better at active listening
- better manage conflicts.

Moreover, you will get a speed course in Deep Democracy - a method to make better decisions by using disagreements constructively.

### How to manage resistance?

It may feel uncomfortable when you disagree with someone, especially if you are challenged on your identity, world view, or causes that you feel strongly about. Here, disagreements may quickly lead to resistance. Perhaps it is us that all too quickly prepares to attack, or perhaps someone else reacts too severely to something we said. Two typical reactions are either trying to convince, criticize, or make fun of the opposition; or ignoring disagreements and arguments. Both reactions will only increase the resistance.

#### 1. Be curious about what happens with yourself

When you face resistance in yourself or others, the best thing you can do is grabbing hold of it, acknowledging it, and exploring the reasons for it. Be curious about what happens within yourself: Why are you getting provoked? Why is this so important to you? Perhaps you feel personally attacked, or perhaps you feel ignored, or perhaps you are just having a bad day. When we know what and why something triggers us, it is easier to put it into words and give others a fair chance to understand what is at stake.

#### 2. Meet them half-way and make space for those who resist

If the resistance comes from someone else, the best advice is to meet them half-way and start a dialogue. Be attentive, listen, and ask clarifying questions: "You say democracy is useless. Why do you believe democracy is useless?" This communicates that we are interested in understanding the other party and that we recognize that they have their own valid opinions. It is easier said than done, as it requires you to set aside your own opinions and values for a while. It is worth remembering that:

- resistance increases when you try to convince the other party
- resistance is a feeling that you cannot dispel by arguing
- resistance is lessened when we feel listened to, seen, and understood
- that you can accommodate resistance by exploring the reasons behind it
- resistance creates further resistance.



## EXERCISE: ACTIVE LISTENING - ABC DIALOGUE

**WHY:** This exercise creates a structure for active listening. You can use the exercise to learn about each other's viewpoints before you must make a decision. It can also help you during different positions in a dialogue.

**WHAT:** The exercise requires at least three people.

**HOW:** Divide the participants into groups of three. Each person gets assigned a role:

- **Person A**, who has two minutes to share their perspectives/opinions/thoughts without being interrupted.
- **Person B**, who then has seven minutes to ask A open and clarifying questions to better understand A. B is not allowed to express their own opinions during the question and answers session.
- **Person C**, who will listen attentively to A and B during their dialogue. Finally, C has one minute to summarize the dialogue.

Do three consecutive rounds so everyone gets to try all three roles.

**EVALUATION:** How did it feel being each of the three roles? What learnings can you take with you from this exercise?



## CONFLICT RESOLUTION: AIM FOR A GOOD DIALOGUE BEFORE YOU TRY TO SOLVE THE CONFLICT

A conflict is more than just a disagreement. It is a disagreement between two parties that often leads to both tension and uncomfortable relations. When people pour their lifeblood into a cause, conflicts tend to arise. In volunteer organizations, people often join because they feel strongly about the cause, and they often invest a lot of their time and social engagement. They are typically active together with their friends. This joint engagement means they have a large social investment connected to the community. It creates many positive possibilities, but it can also lead to conflicts. And, when conflicts arise, they may be difficult to resolve due to their multidimensional nature. There are specific and practical disagreements, value and opinionated differences, and personal conflicts. So, what do you do when disagreements escalate into a conflict?

### Management can lead the way by using open communication

When a conflict hurts, it is often because it has already gone beyond the first steps of the conflict staircase and escalated to a personal and emotional conflict. Such conflicts call to our basic instincts and make us want to fight or withdraw from the other party. This flight or fight instinct creates a foundation for further escalation.

Luckily, there are many good opportunities to ease the mood. To solve the conflict, the parties must wish to solve it and to approach each other which is something people often want to. If they are willing to listen, perhaps guided by a third party, the conflict does not have to escalate any further. Many conflicts result in closer relations between the warring parties when a better solution is found together.

Management is often drawn into conflicts and they may even be directly involved in the conflict. As a volunteer leader, you can work with your role in a conflict situation and practice solving conflicts through communication. This can be done by helping the parties in a conflict opening their communication and insisting on dialogue.

## 8 steps to a dialogue on the conflict

One way to approach the conflict is to attempt to open the communication by asking curious questions and listening to each other:

1. **Clear intention:** Clearly express your wish to solve the situation.
2. **Explain** how the situation looks like from your perspective.  
Remain in your own courtyard and be as specific as possible (I heard..., I felt..., I need to...).
3. **Ask** the others about their view of the situation.
4. **Listen** honestly and try to understand what is at stake for the other parties. Try to understand what feelings, values, and needs shape their viewpoints. Ask clarifying questions and keep your reflections, good advice, etc. to yourself.
5. **Needs:** Ask what the other parties need and tell them what you need.
6. **New opportunities:** Ask what possible solutions they see and then contribute with your own. Talk openly together about the possible solutions.
7. **Choose** one or more solutions and make specific agreements that are realistic and acceptable for all parties.
8. **Acknowledge** the other parties. You can do this by thanking them for their contribution to your dialogue or by telling them how their resources or personal skills contribute to your organization.

The eight steps can be used as a conversational guide or as preparation. You can switch the steps around as needed and use whatever suits your situation and relation.

If you only try to help solve a conflict without being part of it, you can use the eight steps to help ensure that all parties get to voice their opinions and that they are listened to.

## As a leader, you are not supposed to solve the conflict but to insist on dialogue

When the management is involved in conflicts, it is often with the intention of solving them. It can be tempting to focus directly on the solution and propose ways to solve the conflict. This is rarely the best way forward. The solution must be based on the parties' wishes and needs to be sustainable.

Instead, it is much more useful to help the process *toward* a solution by promoting dialogue throughout the entire process. When all parties feel that their needs have been expressed and they have been listened to, the conflict often seems smaller and new solutions become visible.





## SPEED COURSE: DEEP DEMOCRACY – USE DISAGREEMENTS TO MAKE BETTER DECISIONS

Basic disagreements often become more apparent when we have to make decisions together. Typically, there will be a minority with an opinion different from the majority. A classic challenge for an associational democracy is how you accommodate the minority and avoid leaving someone out of the decision-making processes.

You do not need many bad decisions before people start leaving. Although, people often leave because of bad processes, not bad decisions. When you make decisions about topics or causes that you feel strongly about, the process can become especially volatile. Here, it is a good idea to run a more structured decision-making process to let everyone voice their opinion, including the minority. In a structured process, everyone must be allowed to voice their opinion and. By letting everyone speak, you make the decision-making process better and more sustainable while reducing resistance. You can use the Deep Democracy method as inspiration for how to include more perspectives.

Deep Democracy is a method to facilitate a decision-making or dialogue process where you try to access all viewpoints and opinions of what you must decide upon to create support and make better decisions. The method



We are an organization that wants to embrace everyone, but when we make decisions, there is always a minority whose opinions are not included equally in the process. It can lead to the minority not showing up or actually leaves the organization – and that is not what we want.”  
– young volunteer.

has been developed by Arnold Mindell. You can also use the method to actively include the voice of the minority in the decision-making process to ensure everyone has been heard<sup>11</sup>.

### The idea behind

When making decisions as a group, some issues will always be openly and explicitly discussed, while other issues will stay ‘silent’ and only be implicitly discussed as nobody really talks about it. A specific issue or opinion may be withheld or ignored because it goes against the group’s consensus or because it is an unpopular opinion (this is also called groupthink). Or you may not get around to talking about your disagreements for fear of falling out with your friends. Often, what remains unsaid contains valuable insights that can qualify den final decision.

**WHEN TO USE IT:** The method is a useful tool for small groups, like a board, who have to make tough or controversial decisions or when it is difficult to reach an agreement.

**ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS:** The format is useful to let many opinions and viewpoints be heard and to actively include the minority in the decision-making process. Challenging disagreement then becomes a constructive springboard for making better decisions and reducing resistance. The method works best with an impartial moderator that guides the group and keeps an overview of the situation. Hence, it is a requirement that someone is willing to moderate - preferably with experience and who is capable of creating a safe space.

<sup>11</sup>) Thanks to the Danish Institute for Human Rights and the Danish NGO Ungdomsbyen for the inspiration.

## The Deep Democracy approach

### ➤ STEP 1: Bring all viewpoints to light

The facilitator queries all participants and works with them to bring all viewpoints to light. Make sure you ask open questions and stay neutral when engaging with participants whose opinions deviate from yours or the majority.

**WHY:** The aim is to let everyone feel acknowledged and make everyone feel heard. Although, you should also try to get a look at the issue from all sides.

### ➤ STEP 2: Let everyone feel safe enough to say no or express a diverging opinion

When the participants share their opinions on the matter, the facilitator must actively look for what is not said - the diverging opinions. You can ask: “Are there any viewpoints we have not heard yet?”, or “Does anyone see an issue that we may have overlooked?” Nobody wants to be the one that opposes the majority. Emphasize that you aim to investigate the issue



from all possible perspectives, including possible disadvantages. It is all right to disagree, as long as you can remain constructive in your criticism. Consider leveling the playing field by asking everyone to mention at least one diverging viewpoint.

You can also let someone play the devil’s advocate to get other viewpoints into play. Such initiatives make it easier to bring up criticism as it is then associated with a role and not their person. Consider taking turns if it makes sense for your group.

**WHY:** Often, we tend to look for what we agree upon. However, if we only strive to find consensus as a group, it may be uncomfortable to express diverging opinions. If too many hold back, it will negatively affect the quality of the inputs you receive, and this will then affect the final decision.

### ➤ STEP 3: Spread the alternative

In many cases, at least one person will share a diverging opinion. When this happens, the facilitator should encourage the rest of the participants to speak out if they share the diverging opinion. When a “no” is voiced, ask the group “Does anyone else believe the same thing?”

**WHY:** By getting more people to share their thoughts, you avoid singling out individuals as troublemakers just because they have diverging opinions.

### ➤ STEP 4: Summarize and vote - and add the minority’s input

When you have had a thorough discussion, summarize the most relevant proposals before you make a decision. Then, vote on the proposals by a show of hands. Unless you have found an acceptable compromise during your discussion. When the majority has chosen a proposal, ask the minority (one at a time): “What does it take for you to accept the majority’s decision?” When everyone has given their input, incorporate them into the chosen proposal. Make it clear what the new conditions mean for the agreed-upon decision and write them down. Then, vote on the amended proposal.

**WHY:** You may see something you have previously ignored when someone else puts their foot down. The decision may not be sustainable, or it may lack a crucial element to work. You should therefore let the minority contribute with their valuable insights and use them to improve your decision and make it acceptable even for the minority. At the same time, being listened to and having your inputs incorporated represent valuable recognition even if you 'lost' the vote. Incorporating inputs will not only qualify the decision, it can also reduce potential resistance when the decision is implemented.

**NOTE:** Sometimes, you succeed in making a joint decision at the first time. Other times, you will need a couple of rounds before you find an acceptable solution. If you do not make any progress, it may be because of an underlying conflict that must be solved before you can move on.

## READ MORE...

- The Danish Centre for Conflict Resolution has many interesting articles on conflict resolution on their website (mostly in Danish). Here, you can learn more about the conflict staircase, a tool that helps you create a common language for what type of conflict you face. <https://konfliktloesning.dk/engelsk/>
- *The Dialogue Handbook - the art of conducting a dialogue and facilitating dialogue workshops* is DUF's own handbook that can help improve your dialogue.

# POSTSCRIPT

## POSTSCRIPT

With this book, we hope that more children and young people in associations across the globe will be able to engage themselves in democratic work and will feel prepared to create change locally, nationally, and globally. The ability to create change is important. Democracy is not a form of government or a way of life that you can take for granted. On the contrary, as DUF's founder, Hal Koch, so brilliantly explains, democracy must be fought for and regained by every single generation; and there are several tendencies today that should worry young democrats. Fake news and hateful speech on social media threaten our democratic debate and lessen the trust between citizens and the authorities. Faith in democracy is crumbling in several places around the globe, and it leads to further democratic setbacks.

Associational democracy is essential if we are to counter the crisis democracy faces. It is through associations that children and young people learn to stand up and speak for their cause and for democracy. It is in associations you have a common platform where you can meet, practice, and fight the important fights together - even though you may be different. It is through local change that children and young people experience what it is to make a difference in the world. In brief, by actively participating in associational democracy, you get to shape the democrats of the future; and we should not only safeguard them, we should also help them grow and become even stronger democrats.

### **Thanks to...**

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## References

The Democracy Handbook is inspired by many publications and articles. We have tried to reference the original sources, creators of tools and exercises, researchers, etc. whenever possible. Wherever we are able to reference the source or author, it is either mentioned in a footnote or the references at the back of the book. If anyone feels slighted or feels their contribution or idea should be referenced, please contact us so we can correct the references in a subsequent edition of the book.

## Quotes

All the quotes and statements from volunteers stem from the preliminary dialogue meetings where DUF's membership organizations were invited to share their experiences with associational democracy.

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- Demokrati Fordi. The Danish Institute for Human Rights: [www.menneskeret.dk/viden/laeringsportalen/ungdomsuddannelse/demokrati-fordi](http://www.menneskeret.dk/viden/laeringsportalen/ungdomsuddannelse/demokrati-fordi)
- Inddragelse eller involvering - hvordan når vi borgerne i samskabende processer? By Jens Ulrich: <https://www.denoffentlige.dk/inddragelse-eller-involvering-hvordan-naar-vi-borgerne-i-samskabende-processer>
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