DEMOCRACY FESTIVAL

DESIGN DIMENSIONS

Introduction

For the last three years, we have been linking and studying the Democracy Festivals in the Nordic and Baltic countries. This paper is a result of our joint efforts to deconstruct a democracy festival into ten core design dimensions based on the experiences of all eight democracy festivals.

Our societies have been following different historical paths, which has tremendously influenced the development of a democratic culture and the ways the democracy festivals were founded and organised. However, the belief in the power of participatory democracy, when individuals actively engage in the political process, represents common ground for all of the organisers of the democracy festivals.

The Democracy Festival is a characteristic feature of the Nordic and Baltic Sea Region, and we are eager to share our knowledge and experience with the rest of the world.

We hope that this paper will serve as an inspiration and offer a good guide to strengthening participatory democracy, organising a democracy festival or convening people in other events in your home country.

On behalf of the network,

Ieva Morica, Foundation for an Open Society DOTS, Latvia

Zakia Elvang, WE DO DEMOCRACY, Denmark

The Democracy Festival Design Dimensions

The purpose of this paper is to present different dimensions that can be helpful to consider in the design and development of a Democracy Festival.

These dimensions can be used as a guide during the start-up process of a new festival, or to strengthen and support the improvement of an already established festival. It can also be useful for an organiser who is responsible for a stage or event in a Democracy Festival.

Each dimension has been developed in cooperation with the Democracy Festival Platform and consists of the important questions all the festivals have asked, (and are still asking themselves) and concrete examples from the festivals illustrating the myriad ways you can design and develop a festival.
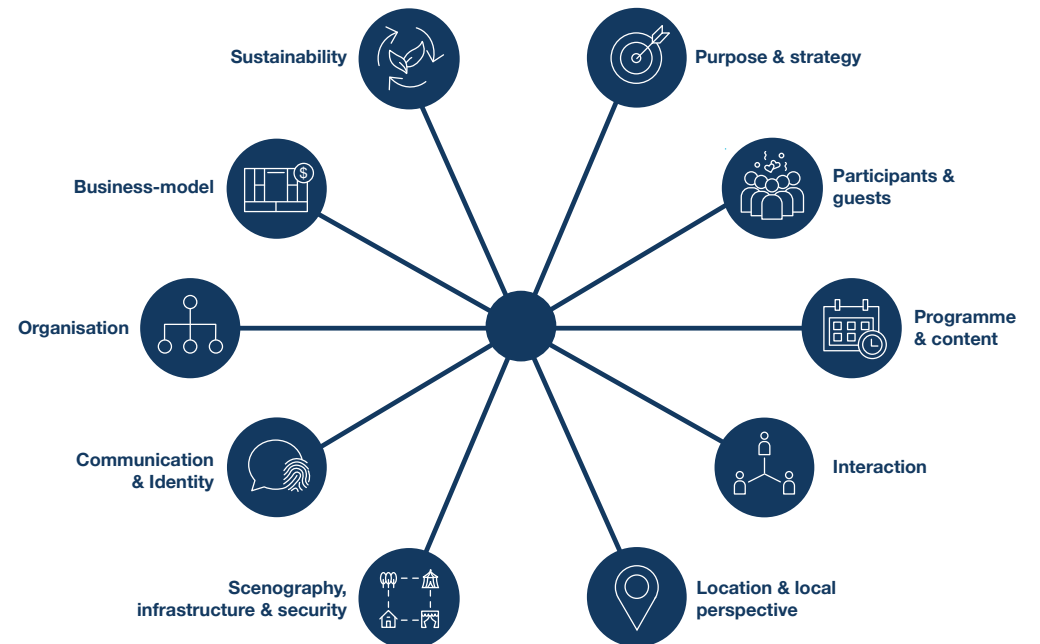
Model: Festival Design Dimensions
Developed by WE DO DEMOCRACY in cooperation with the
Democracy Festival Platform
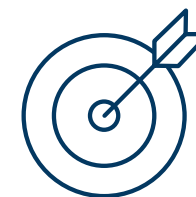
1. Purpose and strategy

The overall strategic purpose or vision of a festival is crucial. It defines the WHY of the festival.

- Why a festival?
- When are we a success?
- What difference do we want to make?

Developing and running a festival comes with a million different questions and dilemmas. The only way to know if your strategy and decisions are taking the festival in the right direction is to have a clear, value-based and well-communicated purpose. All the Democracy Festivals are struggling with defining and redefining the purpose and overall vision of their festivals.

The way democracy is built into the purpose and vision of the Democracy Festivals varies. For some of the festivals, *democracy* is explicitly on the agenda. For others, the agenda focuses on themes and values supporting participatory democracy, such as conversations and opinions. The purpose and vision are defined by the historical, cultural and national context, and, of course, by the founders and background of the initiation of the festival itself. Many of the festivals are struggling with questions of how to measure success, which is linked to the purpose and strategy of the festival: What is the impact? How can we as a festival both measure the success related directly to the festival and still have success criteria that link the festival's success to societal impact?

All the Democracy Festivals share some characteristics: everyone can join the festivals, admission is free and events must focus on subjects that are relevant to society.

Criteria:
- Nationwide
- Working for participatory democracy and societal benefit
- Free admission for participants and open to everyone
- Festival-like in form and expression
- A participatory democracy philosophy
- Informal atmosphere
- Focus on conversations and dialogue

Photo: Arvamusfestival

2. Participants/guests

A Democracy Festival is all about the participants!

- Who are we there for?
- Who do we want to inspire, engage, provoke? For whom are we creating democratic participatory space?
- Who are the different groups of participants?
- What are their needs? And how can we meet them?
- What do we expect from our participants? Are they the audience? Guests? Active co-producers?
- What is the role of local inhabitants? How can we make it relevant for them to participate?

A fundamental dimension underlying all these reflections is the ambition to be a festival that is open to all who want to participate.

Being a Democracy Festival requires reflection and presents dilemmas. What is the balance between attracting high-level decision makers or influencers and "ordinary" people? How can we balance space for politicians from the political parties with space for all other societal actors? How can we ensure the inclusiveness of the festivals for diverse groups of society and make it relevant for everyone?

Democracy Festival attendees are characterized by the following gallery of participants.

The professsional	The lobbyist
The individual	The politician
The media	The activist
The organiser	The volunteer
The NGO	The CEO
	The company

Model: Gallery of characters
Developed by WE DO DEMOCRACY in cooperation with the Democracy Festival Platform.
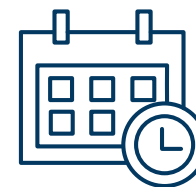
3. Programme and content

A key design dimension of all Democracy Festivals is the programme. What is actually happening at the festival? What are the events, processes, stages and themes making up the festival?

- To what degree do we steer or curate the programme, and in what way? Do we, for example, want a theme that guides the entire festival? Or do we guide the content with design criteria?
- Do we manage the number and content of stages? Do we as Democracy Festival organisers "own" separate stages? Ando we dedicate stages to specific themes?
- Do we match different organisers to create shared stages/events?
- Do we have a specific programme for youth and children?
- Is there a cultural programme and is it curated? Is it an integrated part of the festival? Or is it considered separate and seen as entertainment?

There are big differences in the degree of curating a festival programme. On one end of the spectrum, a festival is more or less an open platform where you (after an application process as event organiser) can arrange any event you may want. The other end of the spectrum is where the festival steers and curates the programme, through design criteria, by hosting their own stages or by being selective in the application process and by cooperating closely with event organisers.

The bottom-line is about striking a balance between steering the festival and allowing event organisers to steer the festival. If the festival organisers steer the process, it is possible to impose criteria, and to matchmake between event organisers, creating cooperation. If event organisers steer the event, they acquire a sense of ownership over the event, and ensure great diversity in the festival offerings.

The Latvian Democracy Festival programme is guided by a manifesto under which all stages operate. The Finnish Democracy Festival has, for example, a programme 100% controlled by the organisers.

Some festivals include a large number of unofficial events. In Sweden, estimates of the number of unofficial events equal official events. Unofficial events are, for example, political parties hosting a reception for their own members or companies hosting dinners for key stakeholders and clients.

Even though the method of curating the programme varies across the countries, the themes are very similar. This illustration gives insight into the most discussed topics in 2017:

Model: The most discussed topics in 2017.

4. Interaction
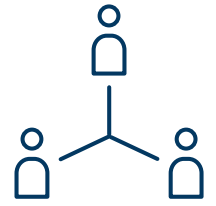
This dimension is about the interaction taking place with the participants/guests during the events at the festival. An event is typically a process that lasts 30 to 90 minutes.

There are big differences in the degree of interaction and the different ways of ensuring and facilitating interaction. What is the purpose of interaction – and what methods and facilitation supports this purpose?

- In what ways do the participants participate? Are they passive receivers/listeners or active co-creators of the content?
- Do we have a strategy for interaction?
- What is the role of the event organiser and host? Speaker, moderator, facilitator or activist?
- Is the outcome pre-defined? Or is it open and defined by participants' input?
- What kind of interaction methods are used? What degree of variation is shown?

Participation is a key principle of democracy. All the festivals have a broad repertoire of methods for facilitating participation. To the right is a list of examples of interaction formats used by the various festivals.

There is a growing emphasis on developing new and more dialogue-oriented interactions, moving away from "talking-suits" in expert panels to co-created events.

The model on the following page illustrates the degree of potential empowerment in the interaction design.

- Talks – keynote and multiple short speed talks
- Open mikes
- Panel discussions
- Workshops
- Pop-up events in the streets
- Demonstrations
- Hot-chair interviews – or softer sofa-conversations
- TV-like interviews with journalists
- Voting
- Dilemma games
- Exhibitions – from just info to interactive versions
- Political stand-ups – like roasts
- Drinks and mingling/socializing
- Speed dating/matchmaking events
- Concerts/theater
- Seminars
- Walking tours
- Sports contests
- Living library
- Lectures
- Installations

Level of Empowerment →

	Inform	Mobilise	Consult	Co-create	Empower
Participation Goal	To provide participants balanced, objective information. To assist in understanding a problem, solutions and decisions.	To motivate, inspire and recruit participants to engage in certain agendas or campaigns and actions.	To obtain participant feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. To work directly with participants to ensure that all concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	To partner up with the participants in each aspect of the process., building knowledge and collective intelligence and shared understanding. Also designing solutions and sharing implementation responsibility.	To place the responsibility on the participants. Give participants decision-making power, resources and responsibility.
Promise to participants	We inform you well.	We will bring you onboard on important issues.	We will acknowledge your concerns and listen to input and advice.	We will lookto you for partnership and collaboration.	We will give you full responsibility and a mandate.
Examples of techniques	• Fact sheet/ pamphlet • Webpages/app • Information meeting • Exhibition/ gallery with content	• Strong narrative and messages • Presentations and speeches • Appealing visuals - and identity • Training	• Workshop/ seminar • Prototype-tests • Co-design methods	• Workshop/ seminar • Building partnership, trust and long-term collaboration • Creating mutual expectations and common agreement on the rules of the game	• Contract and agreements • Budgets and mandates • Rules of engagement, transparency, accessibility and accountability
Examples from Democracy Festivals	• Brochure about school reform • Cancer experts respond to questions • Making available self-evaluations	• Political/message speeches and/or motivational panels • Conversation about the solution/message	• Hack event – design of new municipal youth voter campaigns • Panel discussions, including facilitating conversations with participants about their input	• Co-creation stage, where all kinds of municipal problems are being solved in a co-creation exercise between municipal actors • Co-creation event about a specific topic, problem or question, for example, school politics, work-life solutions for disabled citizens	• Open stage – do what you like, with whom you like, with whatever message you like • Dedicated free stage to civil society, small associations and projects

Model: Potential of empowerment in interaction design.
Developed by WE DO DEMOCRACY.

5. Location and Local Perspective

The location of a festival is also a crucial dimension.

• Is it important to be close to the capital and, therefore, be able to get back and forth from the capital in one day? Or is it important to locate the festival away from the capital so that the participants are forced to have at least one overnight stay?
• What are the pros and cons of being located on the mainland, near the seashore or on an island?
• What is an acceptable level of pricing of accommodations and transport?
• What is the value of being located in (often small) picturesque, non-central places?
• What are acceptable levels of costs and inconveniences that come with hosting up to 4.000 events in a place not designed and equipped for that?

The distance from the capital to the festival locations varies in the different festivals from 1-hour transportation time in Estonia to 5 hours in Iceland, and from being located on the mainland, as in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, to being located near the seashore, as in Norway, Finland and Iceland or on an island, as in Sweden and Denmark.

The map to the right illustrates all the Democracy Festivals in the Nordic and Baltic Sea Region. A crucial dimension of the Democracy Festivals is also the question of how to organise interaction with the local community. For all the festivals, local collaboration has been very important. Some of the key questions in this context are:

• How is cooperation being organised?
  • Is it the local municipality that is the partner (as in the Latvian, Finnish and Icelandic festivals),
  • Is the local authority the founder and driver of the festival (as in the Danish festival),
  • Is the local partnership facilitated and managed by local activists and NGOs (as in the Estonian festival).
• How can the local inhabitants become engaged in the festival?
• How can the development and results of the festival be grounded in the local community and create lasting impact?
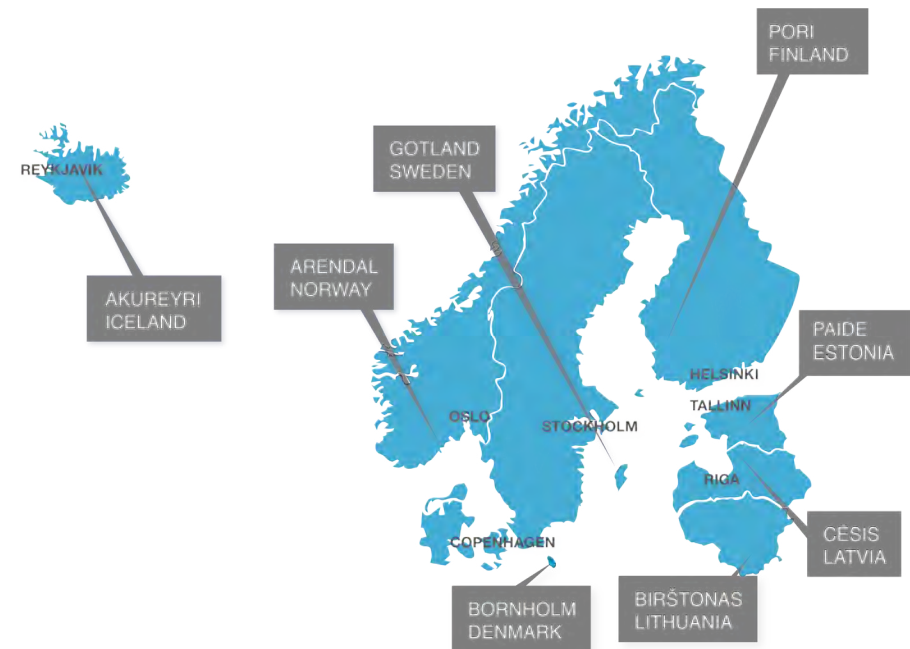
Model: Map of the Democracy Festivals in the Nordic and Baltic Sea Region
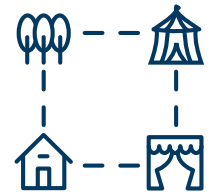
6. Scenography & Infrastructure

The spatial setting and design has immense importance from many angles. The scenography and the infrastructure has an obvious impact, but also, disturbingly, security is a growing concern.

The scenography of the Democracy Festivals plays a big role in creating atmosphere, setting scenes and spaces for interaction and guiding participants around the towns. One can say that it is not possible NOT to create scenography and design the spatial arena of the festivals. If there is no scenography, that is also defining for the interaction and processes at the Democracy Festivals.

- What identity and atmosphere do we want to create?
- What traditions inspire us? In what ways can we incorporate these into our festival?
- How do we handle the mix between the organisers' identity/visuals and the identity of the festival?
- How can the scenography and infrastructure help in fostering better conversations?
- How do we stage democracy? What does democracy and participation look like, if we want to take it a step further than the ancient Greek amphitheatres?
- How do we help guide the participants at the venue?
- How do we best use the geography, topography, architecture and buildings of the village?
- How do we handle the balance between open and restricted events? Between outdoor and indoor events?
- How are parking, transportation and sanitary facilities handled?
- How does the scenography change the area or village that hosts the festival? Are all installations temporary – or are some permanent and, therefore, carry a lasting impact for the local inhabitants?
- How do we handle security? Is it possible to collaborate with the local police and authorities? Or is it necessary to hire private security? How will this be financed?

The festivals have mixed many different scenography traditions, borrowing from the conference and professional world as well as from the creative and theatrical worlds of concerts and market places. Some of the festivals have a very clear and defining identity and scenography; others rely on the input of the event organisers.

Some of the festivals are facing strategic decisions on how to grow, including issues of spatial design. This implies questions on how to grow out of the original settings - a park/castle, as in Sweden and Latvia, a main street by the harbour, as in Denmark or even a single building, as in Iceland?

Photo: Folkemødet
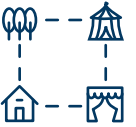
Photo: Almedalsveckan

Photo: Arvamusfestival

Photo: Folkemødet

Photo: Fundur Folksins (from next year as of 2018, LÝSA)

Photo: Arendalsuka

Photo: Diskusijų festivalis „Būtent!"

Photo: Sarunu festivāls LAMPA

Photo: SuomiAreena

7. Communication and Identity

Communication is as important as the content of the festivals. Some would say – if it is not communicated, it does not exist. The important questions are on a basic, strategic level but nevertheless, paramount.

- What is our identity? How do we want the festival to look and sound?
- What is the key purpose of the communication? Before, during and after the festival?
- What are our communication channels? And products? Do we have our own channels?
- How do we create a communication platform, balancing all information needs for all audiences?
- How do we promote our own messages and events?
- How do we orchestrate cooperation with the media? Are they event organisers themselves, as in Denmark? Are they information partners, as in Latvia? Are they the founders of the festival, as in Finland?
- How can the participants and event organisers be encouraged to share their own stories? And how do we build a platform that facilitates and supports that?

Each of the festivals has a communication strategy and communication channels, but there are great differences in how much they rely on social media, and how good they are at using the viral potential of social media. Last, but not least, are they themselves the communicators, or do they simply provide communication infrastructure to others, such as event organisers? A key question is whether you own your own channels or rely on partners' communication and indirect communication (as in Sweden).

At one end of the spectrum is the Finnish festival that live broadcasts almost everything, and the Norwegian festival that makes extensive use of all social media platforms for engagement. At the other end of the spectrum, the Icelandic festival mobilizes people by e-mail and phone calls, and the Swedish festival, which does not have its own social-media channels or hashtags, but has created space used by the political parties and organisers.

The festivals are increasingly focusing on the need to communicate throughout the rest of the year. Do we communicate only leading up to the festival, or are we a permanent presence throughout the year? The answer to this question is heavily dependent on the festival's purpose and vision.
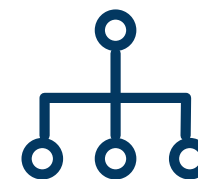
Democracy Festival logos

8. Organisation

Each festival birth story is different, and it is clear that the festivals are defined by their founders and ownership arrangements. Each country also has a separate legal structure, defining opportunities and setting limits.

- Who initiated the festival?
- Who has the legal right to the festival? How are (if they are) the founders represented?
- What is the legal status? What are the pros and cons linked to this status?
- Is the managerial structure linked to the ownership? What kind of mandate do the managers have?
- How are the festival partners a part of the organisation? Are they on a board? Are they financial sponsors? Are they content-partners?
- Is there a specific part of the festival team that organises and manages volunteers?

At one end of the spectrum, the Estonian festival is 100% owned by a volunteer association and managed by a large group of unpaid volunteers with three-year rotating directors. The Latvian festival was established by the Foundation for an Open Society DOTS, and is managed by a steering committee that consists of the foundation secretariat and representatives from the key partners. At the other end of the spectrum, we see the Swedish festival that is owned and managed by the Regional Municipality and partly financed by the government. It has two different political steering committees – one local and one on a national level. The festivals use various legal structures, and have different professional titles for the festival managers, from Festival Director to Project Manager.

Photo: Arendalsuka
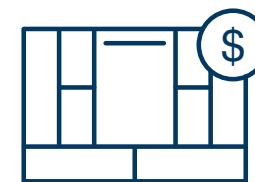
9. Business-Model/Financing

Even though all the festivals have a public benefit purpose, they are also businesses in the sense that all must build a financially sustainable model for running the festivals. The essence of the festival is not profit generation, but all festivals struggle with financing the event.

The illustration on the following page represents a business model canvas of the Democracy Festivals. It lists some of the key questions that are helpful to consider.

None of the festivals is 100% self-financed – but they all work hard on creating a viable financial model, which embodies the need to live by your own principles. Clearly, the business model must be part of the thinking behind the festival from day one, in order to secure independence of design for the festival.
The business models are very different from one festival to another. For example, on the issue of advertising – in Finland advertising is allowed, in Estonia and Latvia it is not.

Photo: SuomiAreena

Photo: Fundur Fólksins

KEY PARTNERS

Municipalities
Cultural institutions
Foundations
Private companies
Political parties
Parliament
Volunteers
Production companies
Communication/
PR companies
Organisers
Media

KEY ACTIVITIES

Production
Infrastructure
Program curating
Communication
Volunteers
Funding
Sponsor and partnerships

KEY RESOURCES

Facilities/area
Brand and goodwill
Identity
Platform
Competences
Network and partners

VALUE PROPOSITIONS

Value-proposition
An informal platform for
the meeting between citi-
zens, politicians and other
key societal actors.
To talk politics and other
important societal issues

Services
2-8 day festival with 200 –
4500 events
Sponsor packages
Partner packages
Accomodation packages
Communication platform

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

Loyalty
How well known is the
festival, its identity and
mandate

CHANNELS

The festival itself – with all
events
SoMe Channels
Webpage
Media
All year events
Ambassadors

CUSTOMER SEGMENTS

Primary
Partners
Organisers

Seconday
Citizens
Politicians
NGOs
Lobbyists
Activists
Professionals

COST STRUCTURE

All-year secretariat
Event-team
Infrastructure and production
Communication

REVENUE STREAMS

Public funding
Sponsorship/Partnerships
Merchandise
Beverages and food
Infrastructure

Model: Democracy Festival Business Model Canvas.
Developed by WE DO DEMOCRACY and based on a model by Alex Ostervalder, Business Model Canvas.

10. Sustainability

All Democracy Festivals have a vision and purpose that links to the aspiration of being a part of creating a better world. The issue of sustainability emerges as an increasingly important dimension. The UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development set a frame for this dimension.

There are big differences in how ambitious the sustainability question is on the agenda in each of the countries. There are several good examples from all the festivals on how to be sustainable economically, environmentally and socially:

- A focus on keeping the price level low for accommodations, food and beverage and transport back and forth to the festival
- Making the festival accessible for less-privileged people
- A focus on cooperation among the locals, supporting the local economy
- Partnerships link private sector, state institutions, municipal organisations, associations, civil society, and volunteers
- A growing focus on ensuring the availability of organic food, and providing a free water supply for drinking bottles etc.
- Free access to sanitation

Model: The UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development

Key dilemmas and design questions to consider

Model: Key Dilemmas. Developed by WE DO DEMOCRACY in cooperation with the Democracy Festival Platform

Problem-oriented		Society-oriented
Societal/Meta Questions		Particular interests
Political parties as founders		Political parties as quests
Subject matter driven		Focus on entertainment
Local festival		National festival
Full control		Co-creation/driven by organizers
Participants/co-creation		Guests/listeners
Once a year festival		All year festival and platform
Festival volunteer organization		No festival volunteer organization
Curated program		Open marketplace/platform
Media/journalist driven		Facilitation/process driven
Formal, professional		Informal, relaxed atmosphere
Digital		Analogue
100% self financed/control		0% self financed/control

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festivals