Demotopia

Impulses for an Experiential Education Democracy Camp for Young People

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Introduction, Theoretical Foundation and Insights

1. Project Idea and Development

This brochure is the result of a partnership project between BÜRO BLAU (DE), outreach gGmbH (DE), the Jugendzentrum[1] JuZe Naturns EO (IT)), and Jugendtreff[2] Inside (BEL). With this guide, we want to share our experiences and methods for creating an experiential education-based democracy camp for young people.

In our first joint project, "Demokratieflugbegleitung" ("Democracy Flight Attendants") – a small-scale Erasmus+ partnership in the youth sector – we addressed the topics of democracy education and right-wing populism while also engaging in an exchange of methods. Our goal was to develop low-threshold methods and materials for youth work institutions enabling youth workers both to sensitize young people to right-wing populism and to respond themselves to and efficiently oppose racist and right-wing populist statements.

A question which continues to guide us, is how to support young people in developing an independent interest in political topics and in becoming actively engaged.

With the subsequent Erasmus+ project, the result of which you now hold in your hands, we aim to bridge the gap between the requirements of contemporary youth work in the field of democracy education, and the expectations of casual activities young youth club visitors bring with them. Experiential learning activities are particularly well suited to create this link, as they not only connect people on a cognitive level but also enable an emotional exchange between participants through shared experiences.

We thus combine democracy education and experiential learning in a European exchange, bringing together different national perspectives in a methodological approach that has so far been rarely used. Experiential education in particular still holds a lot of untapped potential, as well as countless possibilities for synergies with the field of political education.

These considerations are the foundation of our experiential democracy summer camp "Demotopia". We developed it through regular online meetings held every two weeks as well as during a week-long in-person meeting in Berlin in February 2024. This planning meeting was accompanied by a three-day training session on experiential education led by Leander Vierheilig from the Centrum für Erlebnispädagogik e.V.

Three young people each from Germany, Belgium, and Italy participated in this week-long preparatory meeting in order to contribute to the camp's conceptual development. The democracy summer camp finally took place during eight days in August 2024 on the sea-side island of Rügen. Twenty-four young people from Italy, Belgium and Germany, as well as seven youth work professionals and three project staff members from the partner organizations took part.

After the camp concluded, we continued to meet regularly online to evaluate and refine the camp's structure and activities.

The results of our evaluation and the conceptual development of the camp are now presented to you in this brochure.

1 Eng.: Youth Center
2 Eng.: Youth Club

How to Read This Brochure

Since the implementation of the camp did not go entirely smoothly, we took some time afterward to thoroughly review, and in places adapt, the concept. Instead of presenting a rigid weekly schedule or detailed provisions, this brochure offers different modules – ranging from the overarching storyline to the evening circles and the different group phases. The aim is to present methods and ideas that can be applied flexibly and adapted by youth workers to the specific needs and dynamics of their groups.

1. Introduction, Theoretical Foundations, and Insights
In the first part of this brochure, we provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical foundations of our camp. Here, we explain the pedagogical considerations and objectives behind Demotopia and how democracy education and experiential learning can be meaningfully combined. We introduce relevant impact models that guided us in developing the concept and illustrate how theoretical knowledge can be practically translated into a camp design.

Additionally, we take readers through the planning and implementation of our summer camp and share our most important experiences and insights from the pilot project. This section therefore offers both theoretical background and practical findings that can be valuable for the development of future camps.

2. Concepts and Modules for Practice
In the second part of the brochure, we present the concrete building blocks of our camp concept, which youth workers can use flexibly and adapt to different groups. These modules form the core of the brochure and include:

The Storyline as a Guiding Theme
The storyline provides a thematic framework that holds the camp together, offers orientation, and motivates the young participants to actively engage.

Opportunities for Participation
We show how young people can become not just participants, but active co-creators of the camp - for example, through the evening circle or by using Systemic Consensus as an alternative decision-making method.

Warm-Ups for an Energetic Start to the Day
Short, activating exercises help gather the group in the morning, promote focus, and start the day with energy.

Integration of Group Phases
A central element of our concept is the intentional incorporation of group processes. We follow the classic group development stages according to TUCKMAN - Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning - and provide specific methods, exercises, and reflection prompts for each phase.

The brochure concludes with a ↳ **list of sources** stating the literature of our theoretical and methodological foundation.

2. The Demotopia Concept

2.1 Democracy Education – Conceptual Foundation of the Project

Democracy thrives on participation. Beyond its formal aspects, the preservation of democracy fundamentally depends on passing on and strengthening its social dimensions for future generations. This includes values such as respect for human rights and the principles of freedom, equality, and solidarity, as well as the protection of minority rights. Equally important as these values are the "rules of the game", on which democracy relies: a democratic system can only function if people participate and engage. Tolerance toward different opinions and ways of life, as well as the acceptance of democratically made decisions, are also essential parts of these "rules."

Empowering people to assume social responsibility and to actively participate in political processes, as well as fostering democratic values, are some of the key goals of political and democracy education. In times of growing dissatisfaction with the political system and a turn toward populist and far-right "alternatives," it is becoming even more crucial to offer young people opportunities to experience the "rules" and values of democracy in a positive and engaging way.

Experiential education approaches are particularly well suited to conveying these values and skills, as core characteristics of modern experiential learning overlap with central aspects of political education. Experiential education uniquely enables the experience and reflection of group dynamics, allowing discussions about power structures, inclusion and exclusion processes. It also provides space for exploring personal values and expressing them in participatory forms. Experiential education focuses on action – this allows the promotion of a strengths-based perspective and increases young people's sense of self-efficacy. Another element of experiential education relevant to political education is the way experiential learning deals with experiencing one's limits. Increasing awareness of and accepting one's own limits - as well as those of others - helps develop core democratic competencies. Reflection, which happens either during or after experiential activities, further fosters empathy, compassion, and the ability to build and sustain relationships.

2.2 Experiential Education – An Introduction to Action-Oriented Learning

Experiential education is an action-oriented approach to (political) education. Its aim is to contribute effectively to the education and development of young people through carefully selected meaningful experiences.

Experiential education is especially suited to further educational goals such as "personality development or [...] expanding one's scope for action" (MATTHES & BOUS 2017: 244; own translation). Because of the process-oriented nature of experiential learning, it can be difficult to measure concrete outcomes. However, the influence of experiential learning on interpersonal relationships, team building, and values such as responsibility, performance, and action orientation should not be underestimated (HECKMAIR & MICHL 2018: 109–110). By focusing on action and experience, "experiential education can even go beyond traditional understandings of education by shaping the whole personality toward a comprehensive understanding of the world and the self" (MATTHES & BOUS 2017: 244; own translation).

Activities of experiential education can be located in the space between experience and education. It is crucial to achieve a balance between the three levels of event/experience, reflection/remembrance, and transfer/storytelling (cf. MICHL 2020: 9). An experience without reflection and transfer is as insufficient for experiential learning as mere storytelling without an event. Only through reflection and transfer does an experience become pedagogically meaningful (cf. MICHL 2020: 13).

When conducting experiential activities, careful planning is essential – experiential education is explicitly not "adventure education." Although its educational effect comes from confronting participants with challenges and sometimes subjective boundary-testing experiences, both the process and the consequences of the activity must remain predictable to meet a key standard of experiential education – which is safety. Another central principle of experiential learning is ecological awareness, i.e., a sustainable approach to nature and the environment. This becomes especially significant when the learning activities take place in nature (cf. MICHL 2020: 18; MATTHES & BOUS 2017: 245).

Importantly, experiential education is not about "toughness", or any other misguided ideas about endurance at any cost or countering supposed "softness" (HECKMAIR & MICHL 2018: 181; own translation). Meaningful and effective experiential learning requires balancing participants' enthusiasm with their need for rest and providing sufficient space for reflection (cf. HECKMAIR & MICHL 2018: 12).

Experiential exercises typically take place in teams. Successful team building is therefore a major goal of experiential education and can be supported using **Tuckman's model of group development**. The US-American psychologist and researcher originated a theory in the 1960s, which explains and, to a certain extent, predicts the typical challenges groups face as they form. TUCKMAN'S theory of group development also offers effective responses to these challenges.

The classic model includes four phases: Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing, later expanded by a fifth phase, Adjourning.

Forming is known as the orientation phase, where participants may feel uncertain but curious, behaving politely and in a matter-of-fact manner. Project leaders can use icebreakers or games to help participants get to know one another, while also providing structure, information and an open ear to ensure everyone feels comfortable and prepared.

The **Storming** phase is characterized by the participants' negotiation of their positions and roles within the group. This often results in power struggles and discussions about the group's norms and rules. Project leaders should expect conflict. Instead of trying to prevent it, they should provide a safe environment to air out the conflict and work on conflict resolution. If necessary, project leaders should mediate between the parties and ensure that no participants are left out or leave the group.

During the third phase, called **Norming**, members begin to develop trust in the group. Shared rituals, established norms, and a common goal strengthen group cohesion. Project leaders should support this emerging cooperation.

During the **Performing** phase effective collaboration and joint achievement emerge. Effective communication and mutual recognition are key during this phase, allowing project leaders to take a step back and trust the group's ability to work constructively together.

Finally, the **Adjourning** phase takes a special role in this cycle: all other phases can reoccur repeatedly, for example if a new participant enters the group. The Adjourning phase however marks the end of this process and the group's dissolution. It's important to acknowledge achievements and celebrate the group's successes. During this final phase, the project leaders should once again guide the group's activities, in order to ensure enough space for celebration, feedback and reflection.

Although TUCKMAN'S model provides a helpful structure, real-life group dynamics rarely follow a linear path. Groups may revisit earlier phases depending on circumstances, challenges, or individual development – particularly the Storming phase. New tasks, unfamiliar constellations, or emotional stress can cause previously resolved issues to resurface. In experiential learning settings, it is therefore essential to stay flexible and process-oriented, meeting the group where it is and viewing setbacks as an integral part of the learning journey.

Impact Models of Experiential Education

To understand how the activities' educational impact can be intentionally planned within experiential learning, we present four key models below.

① **The Metaphorical Model**
The *Metaphorical Model* goes back to STEPHEN BACON (2003). The participants are presented with tasks that ideally are isomorphic (structurally identical) to their real-life situations. This isomorphy is (partly) made explicit before the exercise begins, so that behavioural change can occur during the activity itself rather than only afterwards during the analysis. The program is thus tailored to the group's goals and needs. Activities are offered and facilitated as metaphors, addressing different - sometimes unconscious - levels of perception and reflection.

↳

Comment/Critique:
For this model to work, project leaders must know their groups well and possess sufficient background information about them. A new, fitting metaphor must be created for each group. Competencies in depth psychology and psychodrama are helpful for this model (HILDMANN 2009).

Other terms used for this model:
- Reinforcement in reflection
- metaphorical experiential education
- "clothing" experience in metaphor

② **Frontloading**
Frontloading is a *component of the metaphorical model*. Linking goals to metaphorical imagery requires considerable time in the planning phase, during which as much information as possible must be gathered. A key focus of this model is on the before, which is called "frontloading" in American terminology. Participants are made aware beforehand of what they are expected to learn. This places high demands on the experiential educator to know the participants as thoroughly as possible in advance, in order to integrate their needs into the program design.

③ Outdoor Bound Plus

In contrast to the previous model, the *Outward Bound Plus* impact model places reflection after the action. The "plus" represents the reflective phase added on to the experiential activity. Project leaders support participants in drawing their own insights from their experiences. Through this reflection, the experience becomes sustainable and educationally meaningful for the participants.

↳

Comment/Critique:
This approach requires project leaders to have strong moderation and communication skills (HILDMANN 2009).

Other terms used for this model:
- Learning through reflection
- reflecting on experience
- classic experiential education model
- experience through reflection

④ The Mountains Speak for Themselves

The impact model *The Mountains Speak for Themselves* assumes that experience of nature itself will generate the desired learning outcomes in participants. Reflection is not required and occurs, if at all, spontaneously among participants. The project leaders' role is limited to organizational matters, safety, and the teaching of necessary outdoor or sports techniques.

↳

Comment/Critique:
For short-term activities, it cannot be assumed that truly transformative or existential experiences will occur. Moreover, it is questionable whether experience gained through a purely outdoor experience is transferable to everyday life. This model also does not allow for setting or pursuing specific (learning) objectives for individuals or groups (HILDMANN 2009).

Other terms used for this model:
- Learning and doing
- trusting in the power of experience
- historical model
- the experience works by itself
- pure experiential learning

2.3 Transfer from Theory to Concept

To foster identification with the content and enable an easy transfer into everyday life, we decided to work with the **Metaphorical Model**. This model assumes that learning occurs when we link previous experiences with new ones, thereby verifying or reconstructing our reality. In metaphorical experiential education, activities are tailored to the personal goals of participants or the specific objectives of the group. This means that individual goals are formulated in advance and connected to metaphorical images. The experiential activities are then aligned with these metaphors, allowing transfer to occur already during the experience itself, thus ensuring that the ongoing learning process remains closely connected to real life.

To work effectively with the Metaphorical Model, the group's specific goals must be clearly defined. For our camp, we identified the following objectives:

- Experiencing democracy as an important part of everyday life
- Creating positive experiences and associations with democracy
- Experiencing self-efficacy
- Making participation and co-creation tangible for participants

We decided to design a metaphor for the summer camp in the form of a ↪ **storyline, p. 20**. This approach ensured that participants knew from the outset what they were expected to learn and facilitated transfer. We used the storyline as a framework, along which we planned and structured the entire week, aligning activities to support both group dynamics and democracy education goals.

During planning, we intentionally kept the daily structure open, scheduling our prepared modules mainly for the mornings. Activities designed to support specific group dynamic processes were planned to be used flexibly, since group phases cannot be controlled but only guided. We deliberately chose to make only minimal specifications for the program in order to give the young participants as much room for creativity and self-determination as possible. This freedom of design was meant to come to life during the ↪ **evening circles, p. 21**, in which we jointly planned the following day together with the participants.

A central assumption of the camp was that identification with democratic values is strengthened through experiences of successful participation and self-efficacy. In addition to allowing co-determination in leisure activities, we wanted to give the young people the opportunity to develop their own rules for communal living at the camp - excluding, of course, the house rules, legal requirements, and any criminally relevant regulations. We assumed that this open framework could serve as an impulse for reflecting on fundamental questions of democratic societies. The negotiation of these rules also took place during the evening circles.

Which of these ideas worked well, and where we would consider alternative approaches for future implementations, can be found in the next section, ↪ **2.5 Insights from the Pilot Project, p. 16**.

Democracy Education Can Take Many Forms

Not every method we used in the camp had a direct link to political topics or democracy – and that's perfectly fine in our point of view. For us, democracy education primarily means placing participation and the experience of self-efficacy at the centre, since we view both as key prerequisites for democratic attitudes and actions.

Many everyday activities in the camp offer opportunities to address democracy-related topics in a low-threshold, accessible way. There doesn't always need to be an explicit reference to politics or democracy – what matters is that participants have experiences that make core democratic values such as fairness, participation, and equal opportunity tangible.

For example, during a basketball game or tournament, a rule could be introduced stating that all participants who are members of a basketball club are only allowed to use one arm. This makes arbitrary forms of privilege and disadvantage visible – without reproducing real forms of discrimination. The experience can then be discussed and reflected upon briefly afterward.

Another example: at the start of an outing to the beach, participants receive small slips of paper assigning them individual temporary limitations, such as "You may not use your stronger arm" or "You're not allowed to use the word 'I.'" These restrictions apply for a predetermined period (e.g., 10 minutes or one hour). The group leaders decide situationally what seems appropriate for the group.

Afterward, a reflection session takes place – either immediately after or during the evening circle. Guiding questions might include:

- In which moments did you feel your restriction most strongly?
- What helped you in that situation?
- What thoughts did you have about justice and equality?

It's important that these restrictions are deliberately linked to the participants' individual strengths, so that the impact of unequal starting conditions becomes tangible. At the same time, it can be pedagogically useful to give some participants limitations that affect their comfort zone less strongly.

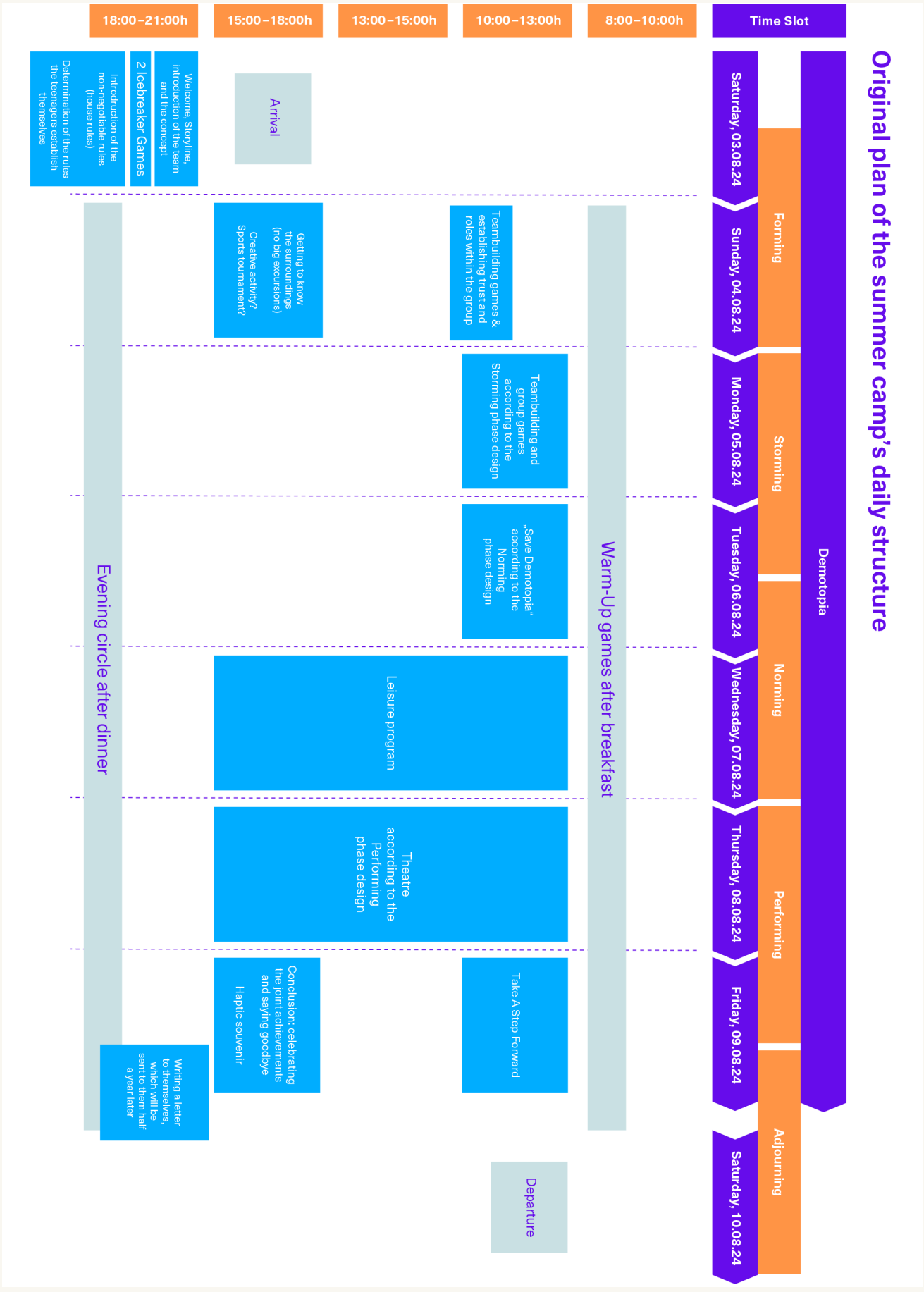
This method is flexible and can be adapted to a wide variety of activities - whether in sports, creative projects, or leisure activities. The crucial factors are a sensitive choice of limitations and thoughtful integration into the daily schedule to ensure there is sufficient space for meaningful reflection.

2.4 Structure of the Summer Camp: Planning and Implementation

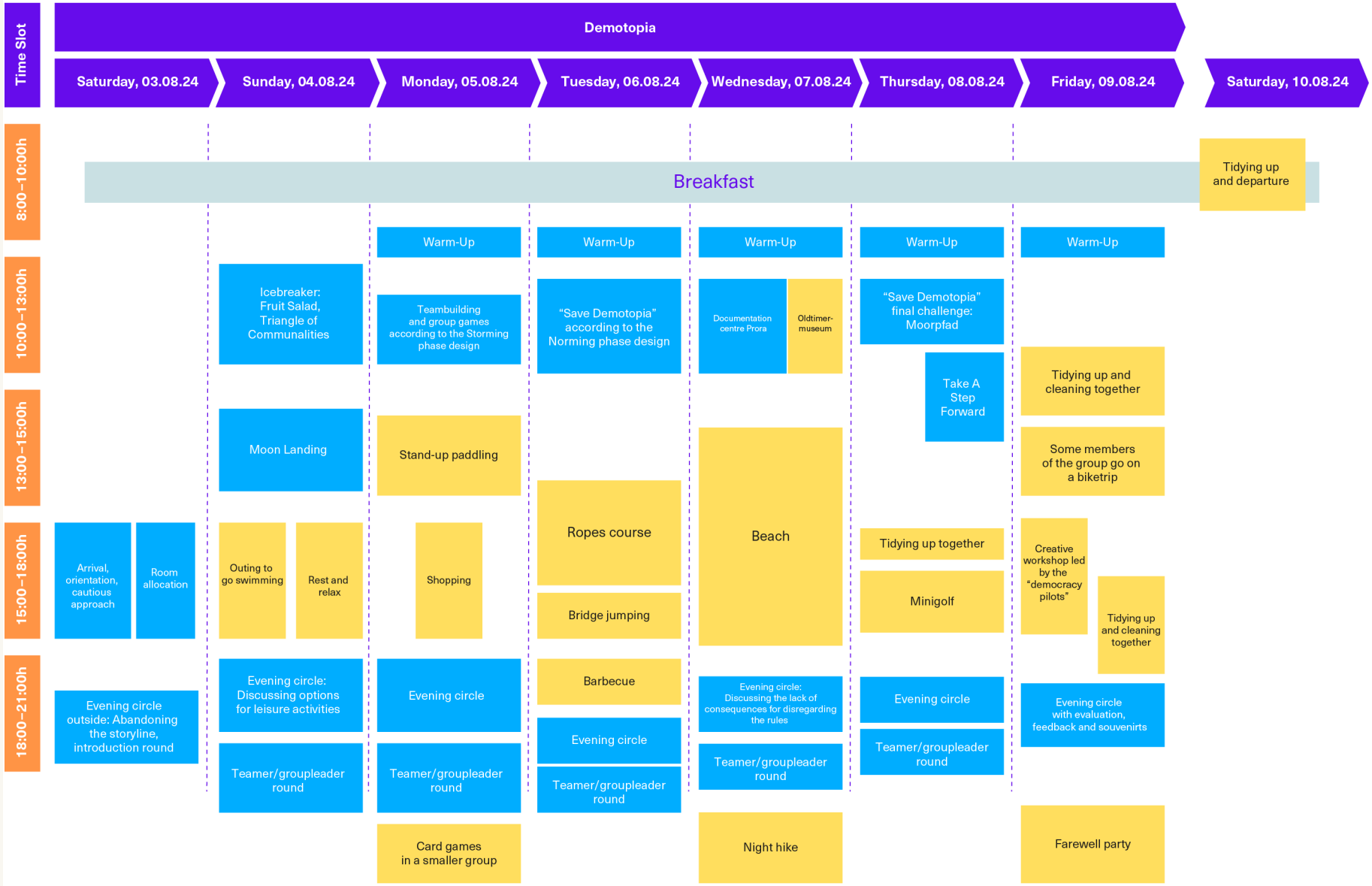
The summer camp was based, on the one hand, on detailed planning of the overall process in order to combine the various components such as the storyline, team phases, and experiential education activities. On the other hand, we intentionally chose not to establish the daily structure in advance, in order to give the participating young people space to actively contribute to the planning and design of the camp.

Below you will find an overview of the originally planned daily structure and the actual course of the summer camp:

Original plan of the summer camp's daily structure



Actual course of the summer camp



Activities that were decided on together with the teenagers during the camp

Activities that were planned before the camp

2.5 Insights from the Pilot Project: What Went Well – and What Would We Do Differently?

What Went Well:
Despite some challenges, the camp was filled with many positive and successful moments. There were deep and meaningful one-on-one conversations between young participants and team members from different countries about democracy, its importance, and their personal experiences. One particularly encouraging aspect was that the young people actively embraced the opportunity to help shape the program – a clear sign of successful participation. In difficult situations, it became evident that participants knew they could ask for help – some grew through this experience and developed a stronger sense of self-efficacy. It was also wonderful to see how initial barriers between groups gradually disappeared, giving way to genuine friendships.

What We Would Do Differently Next Time:
As a pilot run, the camp was a new experience for the entire team – and, as such, an invaluable learning opportunity. But, with the benefit of hindsight, we would like to share what we would do differently in a second iteration.

Responsibilities:
Within our team, responsibilities were not clearly defined. When it came to dealing with boundary violations, there was also no shared approach – we relied too heavily on the internal procedures of the respective youth organizations. The idea of having young people create their own rules was well-intentioned, but confusion arose because it wasn't clearly communicated which rules the camp's youth worker team was responsible for enforcing.

Youth participation and Co-creation:
The pre-planned morning activities competed with the participants' freedom of choice in the afternoons. What was intended as creative openness sometimes resulted in disorientation. We planned from day to day – in retrospect, that was not a good idea. A clear overview of the week and a jointly communicated framework would have created more structure and reliability without restricting the young people's possibilities of participation.

Flexibility:
Even though we had planned to respond flexibly to the group's dynamics, we lacked a smaller delegation team that could have made spontaneous decisions to adapt certain activities. Our group phase planning was too rigid. When the participants actually entered the "storming phase," we gave them too little space to openly work through their conflicts. As a result, the pedagogical activities could not unfold their full potential. In retrospect, a feedback round revealed that for some young people, leaving the camp also meant leaving behind an unresolved conflict – a missed opportunity for the group to grow closer together.

Inclusion:
The evening reflection rounds, designed as spaces for dialogue and exchange, were not inclusive enough – not all participants were able or willing to engage fully. In Chapter ↪ **II.2 Systemic Consensus Building, p. 22**, we present an alternative method that allows for broader, more accessible participation. Feedback from the young participants on the evening sessions was mixed: they appreciated the open format, the opportunity to bring in their own topics, and the chance to gain new perspectives. Some participants suggested that attendance at a minimum number of evening sessions should have been mandatory. Others felt the sessions were too formal and wished for more informal opportunities to connect. Opinions on the timing – right after dinner – also varied: some found it appropriate, others would have preferred a more relaxed setup at that time of day. Criticism was also voiced regarding discussions that sometimes became too lengthy, making the sessions drag on. Finally, some participants suggested that consequences for misbehaviour – which were often decided during the evening sessions – should have been determined earlier and more clearly.

Team:
We realized that the leadership team itself goes through the classic Tuckman group phases – with all their challenges. Our team also experienced a storming phase, which we did not manage to react to sufficiently. This mirroring of the teenager's group processes on multiple levels highlighted the importance of actively monitoring and supporting the team's dynamics alongside the young participants'.

Diversity Awareness:
Youth groups are never "neutral." They reflect societal realities – with all their differences in social background, access to education, resources, and self-perception. The participants came from very diverse social contexts – from privileged to structurally disadvantaged environments. This diversity shaped group dynamics and made social differences visible throughout the camp. For future camps, it is important to be even more conscious towards these differences, actively incorporate this consciousness into planning, and create spaces for exchange at eye-level.

Location:
We were very satisfied with the youth meeting centre and its surroundings, which offered many possibilities as the setting for our camp. Nevertheless, we found that it would have been helpful to become more familiar with the location before the camp began. Ideally, part of the team could have arrived earlier on-site to adapt the planned camp activities to the specific conditions of the location.

Youth Involvement in the Preparation – Experiences with the Democracy Pilots

About six months before the camp took place, the entire team met for a week and participated in a joint experiential education training. Three young people each from Germany, Italy, and Belgium also took part in this week as so-called "Democracy Pilots". They played a special role – their task was to actively participate in the shaping of the camp's content and to contribute their perspectives. Their contribution was a great benefit for us, as it allowed us to align the camp more closely with the participants' realities and to develop initial ideas together with the youth participants.

During the camp, the Democracy Pilots played a very valuable role: they planned and implemented their own activities, such as craft workshops and sport tournaments, for the group. At the same time, they served as an important link between the youth worker team and the other participants.

However, their involvement – especially during the preparation phase – was also challenging. As this was a pilot run, we lacked a clear structure for efficiently and purposefully guiding the youth's participation. Uncertainties repeatedly arose regarding which tasks and responsibilities should be associated with their role, which occasionally led to frustration. This experience showed us that participation does not work automatically; it requires continuous support, guidance, and space for questions.

Nevertheless, the decision to involve youth early was absolutely the right one and a crucial step toward genuine co-creation. Working through these challenges together also gave the participants a very realistic insight into our project work and meant that by the time of the camp, they already knew our team well and felt comfortable with us.

Outlook

Despite all the challenges, we look back on this first implementation with gratitude and critical reflection. We learned a great deal – about group processes, the importance of clear structures, and the balance between openness and reliability. We carry this knowledge forward as a foundation for further developing the concept and for future camps that can respond even more effectively to the needs of young people.

Concept Modules

As described in the introduction, this guide does not provide a fixed weekly schedule. Instead, we suggest various modules: the storyline as a translation of the metaphorical impact model **(↳ Chapter 2.2)**, the evening round and an alternative participation method, as well as various democracy-education, experience-oriented activities based on TUCKMAN'S team-building phases **(↳ Chapter 2.2)**. We hope these modules can serve as inspiration for your own youth camps.

1. Storyline

Plan: For the camp, a *storyline* was prepared in accordance with the Metaphorical Model. It was intentionally kept as open as possible to give participants maximum freedom to shape their camp-experience. The storyline was as follows:

On the very first evening, the group receives the news that their youth clubs have been taken over by authoritarian forces and are now threatened with closure. The authoritarian powers in Germany, Italy, and Belgium are united and strengthen each other. In order to recapture and reclaim the youth clubs after returning back home at the end of the week, we too must stand together and become a community. How this will look is entirely up to you. The rules for living together (aside from house rules) must be decided among yourselves, for example during the daily evening circles. These circles also provide space for any other topics that are important to you, including planning leisure activities.

We, the team, already have some experience with authoritarian powers and will support you throughout the week with training sessions, guidance, and advice.

Implementation:
On the day of arrival, the planned storyline was discarded because it did not seem sufficiently logical, coherent, or practically sustainable. Instead, we opted for an open and honest approach, explaining to participants why the camp was taking place: against the backdrop of a growing global shift to the right, we wanted to give them the opportunity to actively experience and shape democratic processes.

Reflection:
During the subsequent evaluation, another critique emerged: depending on participants' age and maturity, a playful metaphor can be perceived as inappropriate or irritating – especially if it is not convincingly developed or does not clearly relate to their lived experiences. Nevertheless, there are also strong arguments for a storyline: it adds a fun factor, fosters greater identification with the content. It can also facilitate transfer of knowledge and experiences into everyday life. Within the project team, we did not reach a final conclusion on whether we would use a storyline in future iterations of the camp.

2. Participation Opportunities: Evening Circle and Alternative

The Evening Circle

Plan:
Every evening during the camp, an evening circle was held, which was adapted in form and procedure over the week. It was intended to serve two purposes: planning leisure activities and discussing rules that the group wanted to establish themselves.

The daily structure was deliberately left open in the planning. The modules we had prepared were always scheduled for the morning, for two reasons. Firstly, the activities designed to promote group dynamics needed to be flexible, since group phases cannot be controlled but only supported. Secondly, we wanted to provide as few directives and as much freedom for the participants to shape the camp as possible. Decisions on how to shape the camp and which activities to implement were supposed to be made by the participants during the evening circles.

Implementation:
During the evening circles, the plan for the following day was discussed. The circles mostly took place after dinner, based on the assumption that participants would first of all need to eat after a long day. On some days, they were held before dinner, which turned out to be beneficial for concentration and provided a natural time limit.

The moderation rules of the evening circle were adjusted over the week. Initially, we used a method where everyone who wanted to speak would raise fingers to indicate their order: if two people had already raised theirs, I would raise three fingers. This caused two problems: Firstly, the group was not attentive enough to adjust their fingers after each contribution. Secondly, it was unclear whether a raised hand referred to the current topic or intended to introduce a new one. The approach was therefore changed: at the start of the evening circle, all topics were collected without launching into discussion. Then the topics were addressed in order. Moderation was assisted by a person maintaining a speaker's list, giving priority to participants who had spoken little or not at all.

Reflection:
Not all participants are equally comfortable and capable of expressing themselves or participating in argumentative discussions. We therefore looked for a method that initially collects suggestions and allows everyone to contribute nonverbally. Researching after the camp, we came across Systemic Consensus Building, which we will present in the following section.

Systemic Consensus Building: Reaching Agreement in Groups With Diverging Argumentation Skills

This method of consensus building allows a group to select, from a set of self-developed problem solutions, the option that encounters the least resistance. Each proposal is evaluated according to the level of agreement or resistance within the group.

↳

Purpose: Planning and developing collectively, gathering opinions and reactions, working together over the long term.

Not suitable for conflict resolution.

Number of participants
any

Duration
flexible, depending on the complexity of the question and the number of participants

Materials
flipchart, moderation cards, optionally projector & laptop

Instructions

1. Formulating a question
The objective is to make a decision which is supported by all participants. For this, the first step is to develop an overarching question that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no (e.g., “What should we do tomorrow?” or “How should rule violations be handled?”)

2. Creative phase: Collecting proposals
Gather proposals, which should be creative and diverse. All ideas and wishes can be voiced and are considered equally valid. During this phase, proposals are not commented on or discussed.

3. Evaluation phase
Each proposal is evaluated by all participants, which can be done using *resistance points*:
0 = no resistance,
10 = strong resistance (or “I completely reject this proposal”)
The evaluations are recorded on a flipchart or similar.

4. Appraisal
The points are then totaled. The proposal with the fewest points represents the solution with the least resistance and is therefore closest to consensus. This minimizes potential conflict in controversial decisions.

Variations
Phases 2 and 3 can also be conducted or supported digitally. For example, the tool Lamapoll can be used. For this, presentations showing the voting tools should be prepared in advance.

Note
The resistance-point method is designed to provide a more democratic decision-making process because it “no longer makes a resolution dependent on the number of supporters or opponents of a proposal; instead, participants develop any number of solutions and evaluate their conflict potential” (SCHROTTA 2011, p. 23; own translation).

However, it can be argued that decision-making based on positive points might create better identification with the outcome. Therefore, we suggest using *approval points* as an alternative:
0 = no approval
10 = full approval (or “I absolutely want to do it this way”).

3. Warm-Ups

For the shared start of the day after breakfast, we always conducted a group warm-up. These exercises can often be linked to democracy, as outlined below.

Global Warming

Number of participants
any

Duration
approx. 10 minutes

Materials
enough sheets of newspaper

Preparation
none

Instructions:
Two participants are chosen to represent the sun. The other participants each receive a sheet of newspaper to stand on, which symbolizes icebergs drifting in the sea. The two “sun” participants walk around and tear away pieces from the newspapers of the others, causing the “icebergs” to melt. It becomes increasingly difficult for participants to stay on their “icebergs.” They must try to remain standing as long as possible, possibly supporting each other.

Democracy Salad (Fruit Salad)

Number of participants
approx. 12–30 participants

Duration
15 minutes

Materials
chairs

Preparation
set up a circle of chairs with one fewer than the number of participants

Instructions:
Participants sit in a circle and build groups by counting off (1,2,3; 1,2,3; etc). Subgroups are assigned a fruit, e.g., Group 1 – apples, Group 2 – cherries, Group 3 – strawberries. One person stands in the middle without a chair. This person calls out a fruit, e.g., "apples," prompting all "apples" to change seats. Alternatively, they can call "Fruit Salad," and everyone changes seats. Moving only to the next chair in the row is not allowed. The person in the middle also tries to get a chair. Whoever fails to get a chair continues in the middle.

Variations:
— Groups do not have to be named after fruit; they can have other themed labels.
— Instead of fruits, terms like "freedom of the press," "elections," "freedom of speech," or "participation" can be used.
— For lower-threshold options, use everyday places of democratic participation like "youth club," "sport club," "neighborhood."
— Ask participants who speak another language to translate the three fruits. It can be helpful to write these translations on a flipchart and review them with the group. Then fruits can be called out in all languages.
  • Follow-up question: "How does it feel when you do (or don't) understand the language?"
  • Connection to political participation: Who can participate if they do (or don't) understand the language?
— The person in the middle can set a new rule, e.g., "You have to be silent" or "Everyone must clap when changing seats."
  • Follow-up question: "How did it feel when one person set the rule?"
  • Entry point to topics like power, fairness, and co-determination.

Reflection (group dynamics and democracy, if needed):

- How did it feel to suddenly be part of a specific group?
- Who had control in the game – and how did that feel?
- What happens if someone does not understand the rules?
- How can we ensure that everyone can participate?

↳

Connection to democracy

This dynamic warm-up game is not only fun but also teaches participants in a playful way about the tension between competition for limited resources and mutual consideration. It also allows participants to experience what it feels like to make decisions and, conversely, to follow others' instructions. The variations encourage deeper exploration of these themes.

Getting Up Together

Number of participants
approx. 5–30 participants

Duration
approx. 5 minutes

Materials
none

Preparation
none

Instructions:
Participants sit in a circle on the floor and hold hands. They then try to stand up together without pushing off the floor with their hands. They must also keep holding each other's hands while standing up.

Variations:
— Players link arms behind their backs and try to stand up back-to-back.
— Participants are not allowed to speak while standing up.

Reflection on group dynamics and democracy (if needed):
- How was this exercise for you – easy or difficult?
- What helped you succeed?
- How does it feel when everyone works toward the same goal?
- What happens if one person drops out?

↳

Connection to democracy:
Democracy works like this exercise: Only if everyone participates, considers others, and coordinates, something can be achieved together. Every person matters, every voice counts – and without cooperation, you stay "on the ground." Democracy means sharing responsibility, listening to one another, and finding solutions together.

Democracy Only Works Together: Through the Hoop

Number of participants
approx. 10–30 participants

Duration
approx. 10 minutes

Materials
1 hula hoop

Preparation
none

Instructions:
Participants form a circle and hold hands. A hoop is placed hanging on the arms between two people. The goal is for all participants to pass through the hoop as quickly as possible without letting go of each other's hands. How many rounds can the group complete in three minutes?

Variations:
— How long does it take for the group to complete a round?
— All participants close their eyes during the exercise.

Reflection on group dynamics and democracy (if needed):
- What was important to move through quickly?
- How did you support each other?
- Were some participants struggling more than others? What did you do?
- Who made suggestions, and who decided?

↳

Connection to democracy:
Democracy means finding solutions together, even when it's challenging. Like passing the hoop, it requires cooperation, consideration, and creative thinking to ensure everyone can participate. No one should be "let go" – just as no one should be excluded in a democratic society. Every person counts, and only together can progress be made.

How Do We Solve This Together? – Experiencing Democracy in the Gordian Knot

Number of participants
approx. 10–30 participants

Duration
approx. 20 minutes

Materials
none

Preparation
none

Instructions:
Participants stand in a circle and stretch their hands into the centre. Each person closes their eyes and then reaches for and holds on to two hands from two different participants. Once each hand is connected to a different hand, the group tries to step back as far as possible without letting go. A Gordian Knot is formed! The group's task is now to untangle the knot without releasing hands. In the end, participants should form a circle again, which may not always succeed.

Variations:
In smaller groups, the "confused" initial state can be created blindfolded: The group forms a circle, closes their eyes, stretches hands forward, and moves slowly to the center. There, each participant reaches for two "free" hands.

Reflection on group dynamics and democracy (if needed):

- What helped you untangle the knot?
- Were there moments when you didn't know what to do? How did you handle it?
- Who had a lot of space to contribute? Who shared ideas? Who was heard?
- How does it feel to be stuck together?
- What does this have to do with community or democracy?
- Are there societal challenges that feel like a knot – complex problems with no simple solutions?
  - e.g., climate crisis, migration, social justice

↳

Connection to democracy:
The knot represents political or societal challenges: complex, entangled, confusing. But: if everyone works together, listens, and shows consideration, progress is possible. No one can free themselves alone – and no one is left behind. Democracy means solving problems together without severing connections.

Ballot Competition

Number of participants
approx. 12–30 participants

Duration
5–10 minutes

Materials
100 "ballots" made of cardboard (e.g. beer coasters), stopwatch/ alarm

Preparation
divide the area/room where the game takes place into two halves and mark the centre line.

Instructions:
Two roughly equal groups are formed and each place themselves evenly distributed on their side of the playing field. On a signal from the facilitator, participants have 2 minutes to throw their own "ballots" onto the other team's side. They are not allowed to leave their own side of the playing field. The team with the fewest ballots left at the end wins.

It is recommended to set a timer. When it goes off, no more ballots may be thrown.

Variations:
The throwing period can be shortened further.

Reflection (group dynamics and democracy, if needed):
- What strategy did you use and why?
- Did you focus more on getting rid of your own ballots, or on blocking the other team's ballots?
- Did your group communicate and coordinate? How did you handle the time pressure?

↳

Connection to democracy:
This game provides an opportunity to reflect on the importance of elections in a democracy: ballots symbolize each individual's vote. In a democracy, every vote counts – but only if it is actually cast. At the same time, the game encourages reflection on fairness, competition, and mutual respect in political processes. It highlights that democracy involves both competition and cooperation, and above all, participation.

I Am Democracy …

Number of participants
any

Duration
approx. 15 minutes

Materials
circle of chairs + three free chairs

Preparation
optionally set up a circle of chairs

Instructions:

Introduction

Participants sit in a semicircle, with three free chairs placed side by side at the front. A facilitator sits on the middle chair and explains that this game is about quick associations, which don't need to be logical or clever.

The principle is illustrated with an example like: "I am a chicken, who goes with me?" Two participants who have associations with "chicken" quickly sit on the free chairs and say, e.g., "I am the egg" or "I am the factory farm." The person on the middle chair quickly chooses (e.g., the egg) by saying "I take the egg," followed by that person and "the egg" returning to their places in the group. The "factory farm" then sits in the middle and says, "I am a factory farm, who goes with me?" and the process continues.

Game

Once all participants understand the game, the game begins. One participant volunteers to be the first person who comes to the front and sits in the middle chair. The person says: "I am democracy, who goes with me?"

The exercise ends when participants run out of associations or the same people participate repeatedly, or after the game has been going on for over 10 minutes. Then the facilitator can sit on a chair and give the final association: "I am the end of this game."

Reflection (group dynamics and democracy, if needed):

- What associations with "democracy" were mentioned?
- What understanding of democracy emerges from these associations?
- Were the contributions mainly positive, critical, or creative?
- Which roles, values, institutions, or challenges were mentioned – and what might have been missing?
- Did everyone participate?

Were there participants who did not engage at all, and if so, why? During the discussion, it can be highlighted that democracy has many facets: participation, elections, freedom of expression, justice, media, debate culture, as well as challenges like populism, disinformation, or inequality. It is also worth reflecting on why some participants contributed more often than others – does this reflect real-world political dynamics? Who is heard? Who stays silent?

↳

Connection to democracy:
The game playfully illustrates how multifaceted democracy is – it is not a single idea but a combination of many elements. It becomes clear that democracy triggers very diverse associations. The facilitator's task can be to highlight common themes among participants' associations.

Citizen and Politician

Number of participants
any

Duration
approx. 15 minutes

Materials
none

Preparation
if necessary push tables and chairs aside

Instructions:
This game works best outdoors on a grassy area. From the large group, form teams of three – one person is the citizen, and the other two are the politicians. The citizen stands in the middle of the playing field, while the two politicians stand back-to-back with the citizen, facing opposite directions. On a signal, the politicians start walking in opposite directions.

The goal is for the citizen to guide the politicians so that they run into each other's arms. Navigation works as follows: a tap on the right shoulder causes the politician to turn slightly right – the more frequent the taps, the sharper the turn. If politicians feel no shoulder tap, they continue straight until they hit an obstacle. At an obstacle, they move in place until it disappears (e.g., another player) or the citizen redirects them. Once the citizen successfully guides the politicians to meet and collide, roles rotate so that everyone has a chance to be the citizen.

Reflection (group dynamics and democracy, if needed):
- How did it feel to be guided?
- How did it feel to guide the "politicians"?
- How difficult or easy was it as a "citizen" to steer the "politicians"?
- How much power do citizens actually have over politicians in real life?

↳

Connection to democracy:
This game invites the group to reflect on how much influence "ordinary" citizens have over politicians in a democracy. In a follow-up discussion, it can also explore who may be partially or entirely excluded from this power (e.g., children, stateless people, people without permanent residence, etc.).

4. Integrating Group Phases into Camp Planning

We structured our camp planning around BRUCE TUCKMAN'S group phase model described in Chapter 2. This helps to appropriately and supportively guide the typical development phases of a group – from initial orientation through conflict and cooperation phases to closure. Facilitators play a key role in these phases, offering guidance, managing conflicts, and supporting the group as needed, or stepping back when appropriate. Importantly, group development rarely follows a linear path; setbacks, particularly during the conflict-prone storming phase, are common and part of the learning process.

4.1 Forming: Enabling First Encounters and Orientation

The Forming phase is the orientation phase, in which participants interact politely but at a distance, gradually "getting to know" each other. Participants slowly understand their roles within the group. Facilitators should anticipate being tested by participants. Productive work is usually not possible in this phase. The focus of facilitators should be on supporting the getting-to-know-you process and providing security and orientation.

Below are playful methods suitable for ice-breaking and introduction phases. In our experience, "surface-level" methods like Speed-Dating are less effective (though they may still be useful to have on hand depending on the group). We recommend using more cooperative methods that allow for participants to get to know each other on a profound level.

Speed-Dating

Number of participants
approx. 16–30 participants

Duration
approx. 15–20 minutes

Materials
chairs, optionally prepared icebreaker questions, stopwatch

Preparation
set up two concentric circles of chairs: a larger outer circle and an inner circle with the same number of chairs, so that every chair in the outer circle is facing a chair in the inner circle.

Instructions:
Participants sit in two concentric circles facing each other. The facilitator reads a question, and participants discuss it with the person opposite them. Each discussion lasts 1 minute. Afterward, the outer circle rotates one seat, and the process repeats until all participants in the inner circle have spoken with each person in the outer circles. The speed dating questions might include:

1. Dog or cat?
2. Pizza or fries?
3. Car or motorcycle?
4. Mosquitoes or wasps?
5. Never be able to hear again or never be able to see again?
6. ...

Variation:
Speed-Dating with Opinions – Encountering Different Perspectives: For this variation, it may make sense to use smaller groups and allow longer discussion times.

1. Is it okay to have a different opinion?
2. What does justice mean to you?
3. Do you prefer clear rules or freedom?
4. What should students learn about politics in school?
5. ...

Possible Reflection Questions:
- Did anyone learn something new about a teammate?
- Was there anything surprising or unexpected?
- Did someone think very differently than you?
- What surprised you?
- How did it feel when you disagreed?
- What is needed to listen well – even when opinions differ?
- How could this be important in real life?

↳

Connection to democracy:
Democracy thrives on the meeting of different opinions – and on staying in dialogue despite differences. This game teaches participants to listen, express themselves, stay open, and tolerate differences. The goal is not to "be right," but to understand one another – this is what characterizes democratic dialogue.

Triangle of Commonalities

Number of participants
approx.9–24 participants

Duration
approx.30 minutes

Materials
flipcharts and markers

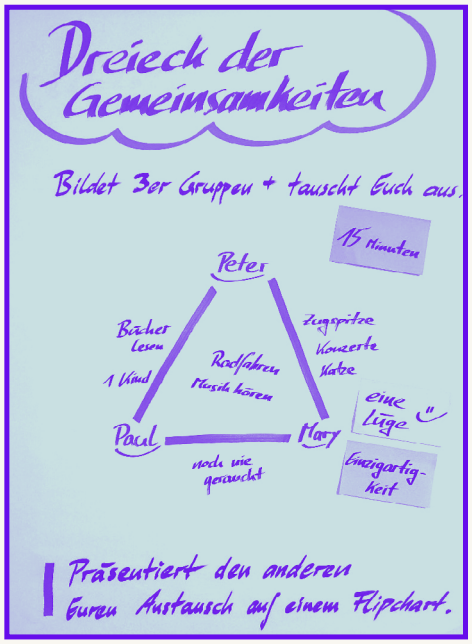
Preparation
none

Instructions:
Form small groups of 3 participants who know each other as little as possible. Each group receives a flipchart and draws a large triangle. At each corner of the triangle, write the name of one group member. The small groups then enter into discussion. They have 15 minutes to discover things they have in common and record them within the triangle.

Variations:
Everyone is allowed to tell one lie.

Possible reflection questions:
- Was it easy or difficult to find things you have in common?
- Was there anything that surprised you?
- How does it affect the group to see what you have in common?
- Why is it important not to focus only on differences?

Image:
Leander Vierheilig



Example: Members A and B discover they both like cooking. “Cooking” is written on the line between A and B. If members A, B, and C all have a dog, this is written in the center of the triangle.

Afterward, the triangles are presented to the rest of the group.

↳

Connection to democracy:
Democracy relies on community and mutual understanding. Even though people are different, there is almost always something that connects them. This exercise highlights such connections and shows that trust grows when we discover commonalities – and accept differences. Those who feel connected are more willing to listen, compromise, and participate.

Moon Landing

Number of participants
approx.10–30 participants (in teams of 3–5)

Duration
approx.30 minutes

Materials
per team: 20 sheets of A4 paper, 1 meter masking tape, 1 raw egg

Preparation
none

Instructions:
Divide the group into teams of three to five participants. Each team receives 20 sheets of A4 paper, one meter of masking tape, and a raw egg. The goal of the game is to protect the egg so that it survives a drop without breaking.

Teams have 18 minutes to build a "rescue capsule" for the egg. The capsules are then tested by dropping them from various heights. The team whose egg survives the highest drop wins.

After the game, teams (or the most successful team) should be asked about their process and their "recipe for success." Often, these groups plan only briefly and experiment a lot.

When dropping the eggs, make sure the surface is easy to clean – egg stains are not popular in seminar rooms.

Possible reflection questions:
- How did the group handle roles and task distribution?
- Were roles assigned in advance or did they emerge naturally?
- Was everyone satisfied with their role? Was there a team member guiding or moderating the process?
- How did the group decide on the design of the construction?

↳

Connection to democracy:
In every group, decisions must be made, tested, voted on, and improvised – just like in democratic processes. Who takes responsibility? Who contributes ideas? Who gets heard? For the egg to survive, the group must collaborate effectively, even under time pressure and with limited resources.

This activity demonstrates that democracy does not always mean harmony – it also means diversity, compromise, and joint action.

Marshmallow Challenge

Number of participants
approx. 15–30 participants (in teams of 4)

Duration
approx.40 minutes

Materials
per team: 20 spaghetti sticks, 1 meter masking tape, 1 marshmallow, optionally 1 meter string/ thread

Preparation
none

Instructions:
Divide the group into teams of 4 participants. Each team receives 20 spaghetti sticks, 1 meter of masking tape, 1 marshmallow, and optionally 1 meter of string. Using these materials, each team tries to build the tallest possible tower with the marshmallow placed on top. The focus is on creativity and experimentation. Teams have 18 minutes to construct their tower, after which the height is measured from the base to the marshmallow on top, in order to determine which is the tallest tower.

After the game, teams (or the most successful team) should be asked what their “secret to success” was.

Possible reflection questions:
- How did the group handle roles and task distribution?
- Were roles assigned in advance or did they emerge naturally?
- Was everyone satisfied with their role?
- Was there a team member guiding or moderating the process?
- How did the group decide on the design of the tower?

↳

Connection to democracy:
The Marshmallow Challenge playfully demonstrates the importance of collaboration, communication, and participation in achieving a shared goal – just like in a democracy. As in democratic processes, it’s not only about who has the best ideas but also about how decisions are made, how differing opinions are handled, and how responsibility is shared.

Paper Planes

Number of participants
up to 60 participants
(in teams of 3–7)

Duration
approx. 40 minutes

Materials
plenty of copy paper

Preparation
none

Instructions:
Participants are divided into teams of 3–7 and build paper airplanes. The goal for each team is to create the airplane that flies the farthest. Teams have 20 minutes to agree on a flight model and then produce ten identical airplanes of that design. After the building phase, the planes are tested together, preferably outdoors. Each team tests all ten planes, and the performance is measured either by the average distance of all throws or the average distance of the three farthest throws.

Possible reflection questions:
- How did the group handle roles and task distribution?
- Were roles assigned in advance or did they emerge naturally? Was everyone satisfied with their role?
- Was there a team member guiding or moderating the process?
- How did the group decide on the design of the plane?

↳

Connection to democracy:
This activity demonstrates the importance of teamwork, coordination, and joint decision-making for achieving a successful outcome – just like in a democracy. Participants must agree on a model, divide tasks, communicate with each other, and take responsibility. As in the world of politics, this activity also involves negotiation processes: different ideas coexist, not all can be implemented at the same time, yet a shared solution must be found.

4.2 Storming: Addressing Conflicts and Supporting Role-Finding

The Storming phase, also called the conflict phase, revolves around conflicts within the group. During this phase, hierarchies are contested, and subgroups may form, often engaging in conflicts among themselves.

Although the Storming phase is generally placed after the Forming phase in sequence, it can reappear at any time within a group, in which case it is crucial for the supervising educators to react quickly. Since conflicts can also split a group, addressing them should take priority over simply sticking to a planned program.

How conflicts are resolved depends on the group. Our approach was based on the assumption that it is possible to teach certain skills playfully, which can help participants navigate the Storming phase as a group. Games that focus on communication and coordination are particularly suitable for this purpose.

For the Demotopia camp, we prepared a morning with supportive games, as described below. These games can also be adapted to the situation or played independently.

Whenever a conflict arises within the group, it must be addressed. This requires providing time and space. In a camp setting, this means interrupting the day's plan, sitting together as a group, and openly naming the conflict. The role of the educators is to moderate the conversation. De-escalation and maintaining a neutral position are essential. All parties involved should have the opportunity to express their perspective. To resolve the conflict, it can be helpful to agree on a shared goal (e.g., ensuring that everyone can have an enjoyable camp experience). Our collected games can support this process by highlighting the importance of constructive conversation **(e.g., ↳ Market Cries)** and strengthening group dynamics **(e.g., ↳ Moor Path)**. Once fundamental conflicts have been resolved and overcome, the educators can assume that the Storming phase has passed for the time being.

Reflection: Our approach was only partially effective, as some methods were quite confrontational, and we were already in the midst of a conflict. Rather than planning a fixed Storming program, it is important to be prepared and mindful. A list of games and an assigned moderation role can be agreed upon in advance.

Instead of the methods outlined in this chapter, it is also possible to select methods that focus more on cooperation **(e.g., ↳ Moon Landing)**. After the conflict has been addressed, the methods described below can be used, for example to give participants who tend to talk a lot a sense of what it feels like not to be heard **(e.g., ↳ Market Cries)**. Another option is to introduce these methods only in the Performing phase.

To conclude a successfully navigated conflict, a nice group activity can be rewarding. For example, a day at the beach spent building a sandcastle together could be an option for combining a reward for overcoming conflict with further group bonding.

To support the Storming phase, we designed an obstacle course. The course helps the group engage with group dynamics, communication, and cooperation in a playful way during a phase of conflict. At the same time, it provides a framework in which new group constellations can be tested, and tensions can be processed through action.

↳

Procedure

1. Group Division

The participants independently divide themselves into three groups of approximately ten people each.

- *Important:* Each group must include at least three participants from each of the three countries (or all groups).
- *Optional:* If needed, support the group division with a short game or random assignment to mix up existing dynamics.

2. Stations

Each group passes through three game stations, accompanied by a facilitator. At each station, the necessary materials are provided along with a laminated game instruction sheet on colourful paper. The games should be chosen in order to set the focus on cooperation, communication, and problem-solving. The games we consider suitable for this purpose are listed after this procedure description.

3. Reflection Mirror (4th Station)

After completing the three stations, each group proceeds to a fourth station: the Reflection Mirror. Here, a short guided group reflection takes place:

- What worked well in your group?
- Were there any misunderstandings or conflicts?
- What roles did you take on?
- How did you support each other?
- ...more questions and ideas can be found on ↳ **p. 48**.

4. Final Round With the Whole Group

After completing all stations, all groups come together again. The overall reflection is intentionally kept low-threshold:

- The facilitators ask a question such as: “How was the course for you personally – did you feel comfortable in your group?”
- Participants close their eyes and indicate their response with a thumbs gesture: 👍 = good, 👎 = bad, 👉 = neutral/unsure
- Anyone who wants to may then voluntarily add a comment.

Shouting-Yelling-Clapping

Number of participants
approx.20–30 participants

Duration
approx. 10 minutes

Materials
none

Preparation
none

Instructions:
The group divides into two teams (teams A and B). Team A forms two rows facing each other at a distance of about 20 meters. Team B positions itself between the two rows formed by Team A. One half/row of Team A is then given words that they must shout to the other half. The opposing Team B tries to prevent the second row of Team A from understanding the words by yelling and shouting loudly. How many words can be successfully communicated within a set time (e.g., three minutes)? Afterward, Team A and Team B switch positions.

Possible learning experiences:
The game requires cooperation and coordination within the team. Additionally, participants experience in a playful setting what it feels like to have to shout over disturbances. These experiences can positively impact the group's communication culture during challenging discussions.

↳

Connection to democracy:
This exercise playfully raises awareness of central democratic principles such as respectful communication, active listening, and participation. It allows participants to experience what it feels like when their voice is drowned out, fostering empathy for overlooked or marginalized perspectives. At the same time, it strengthens teamwork and the collaborative negotiation of strategies – key competencies for democratic interaction.

Market Cries

Number of participants
approx. 5 participants

Duration
approx. 10 minutes

Materials
none

Preparation
none

Instructions:
Two opponents from the group act as competing "market criers " for 60 seconds. Their goal is to "sell" a pre-determined product (e.g., strawberries) to the rest of the group. They try to outshout and outdo each other, criticize the other's product, and promote their own. After 60 seconds, the remaining group members decide which shouter convinced them the most. The group then reflects on the communication experience.

Possible learning experiences:
The exercise increases sensitivity to differences in communication skills among participants. It can encourage the group to be more considerate toward those who have less practice expressing themselves.

Variation:
"Election Campaign" Instructions:
Instead of selling a product, the two players now act as "candidates" representing a political issue or topic (e.g., environmental protection vs. digitalization, or "more sports classes" vs. "longer breaks" at school). Within 60 seconds, they aim to gain as many supporters as possible for their position. Loudness is allowed, but persuasive arguments, creativity, and respectful communication count more. The audience votes on which position convinced them and explains their choice.

↳

Connection to democracy:
This variation promotes understanding of democratic negotiation processes and the value of diverse opinions. It demonstrates that democracy is not just about being loud, but about convincing others through reasoning. Reflection on communication styles, manipulation, and majority decisions strengthens awareness of fair and respectful political debate.

Lowering the Stick

Number of participants
approx .8–15 participants

Duration
approx. 10–20 minutes

Materials
none

Preparation
none

Instructions:
Participants stand in two rows facing each other. Everyone holds their hands forward with elbows bent and index fingers extended. The stick is placed on the fingers so that it rests freely without being held or fixed by other fingers. The goal is to lower the stick gently to the ground without any finger losing contact. If one person loses contact, the group starts over.

Possible learning experiences:
Participants must coordinate their pace. If someone moves too fast or doesn't consider slower group members, the stick cannot be successfully lowered together. This activity also encourages negotiation of roles within the group (e.g., leader).

↳

Connection to democracy:
The exercise illustrates that shared decisions and goals can only succeed when everyone is heard and involved. It promotes negotiation, consideration, and the ability to adapt one's pace to the group – core competencies for democratic action.

Three Pillars of Democracy

Number of participants
approx. 15–25 participants

Duration
approx .20 minutes

Materials
2 sets of 3 different cards with 1x Judiciary, 1x Executive, 1x Legislature (alternatively: 6 balls in three different colors); 1 Hula Hoop ring

Preparation
prepare three cards that clearly read each one of the three pillars of democracy according to the separation of powers (Judiciary, Executive, Legislature).

Instructions:
The group is divided into two teams (for more than 25 participants, three teams). First, each team decides separately which non-verbal signal will represent each pillar of democracy (speaking, coughing, laughing, or other sounds are not allowed as signals). The facilitator should not suggest signals.

Team members then sit in a long line, either cross-legged or with legs stretched out, with the rows parallel about 1 meter apart, all facing the same direction. The facilitator stands behind the two groups, hiding the cards, which each show one pillar of democracy, behind their back. In front of the group, about 4 meters away, the hoop is placed. The second set of cards depicting the three pillars is spread out inside the hoop.

The facilitator now shows one of the three cards (any one) to the two participants sitting right at the back of their teams row. That person must pass a signal to the next person in the line without speaking or making sounds, and the signal continues down the line. When the signal reaches the front, the first team member runs to the hoop and grabs the card corresponding to the signal. If available, a second facilitator can act as a referee at the hoop.

The first person to get the correct card goes to the back of the line, and the rest move forward. If the wrong card is taken, the person sitting right at the back in that moment moves all the way to the front. The winning team is the one where the person, who was sitting at the front when the games began, reaches the front first again.

The facilitator must ensure that at the start of each round, all members except the last one are looking forward and that no noises are made during transmission. If communication fails entirely, a timeout for a team discussion can be taken.

Possible learning experiences:
In addition to negotiating hierarchies (see “Lowering the Stick”), participants can explore different communication strategies. This can increase acceptance of strategies that differ from their own.

↳

Connection to democracy:
This exercise provides an opportunity to explain and convey the principle of separation of powers in a playful way. It also demonstrates the importance of clear, reliable communication and collaboration for the functioning of democratic systems, while promoting understanding of complex decision-making processes and the recognition of different roles and solutions in a democracy.

Escape

Number of participants
approx. 10–30 participants

Duration
approx .10 minutes

Materials
none

Preparation
none

Instructions:
Participants form a large circle and place their arms over the shoulders of the people standing next to them. One person stands inside the circle and must try to leave the circle. The group's task is to prevent this.

Possible learning experiences:
This game encourages physical closeness, breaking down barriers and fostering connection. Different breakout strategies highlight different qualities – some may rely on strength, others on clever tactics. Participants also experience standing alone against the group, which fosters empathy in real-life conflict or exclusion scenarios.

↳

Connection to democracy:
This activity illustrates power dynamics and group pressure, and what it feels like to assert oneself against the majority. It raises awareness of exclusion, resistance, and civil courage – key elements of democratic coexistence – and fosters empathy for those facing opposition or marginalization in everyday life.

Closing Reflections

Whether and how you reflect on these methods should be decided based on your group and the context. Possible questions include:

Individual Reflection

- How did you feel during the conflict/exercise?
- What bothered you – and what helped you?
- Was there a moment when you felt unseen or unheard?
- What was your own contribution to the way the situation unfolded?

Group Reflection

- What was difficult about working together – and how did you handle it?
- Who assumed which role in the group? Was this decided consciously?
- Did subgroups form? Why – and how did that affect the situation?
- Which strategies helped you progress as a group?
- Was everyone heard? If not – why not?

4.3 Norming: Feeling Team Spirit and Building Trust

The Norming phase usually occurs after the Storming phase, when differences, diversity, and conflicts have been revealed and negotiated. In this phase, it is especially important to support the group's ability to cooperate, as it is about enabling individual participants to act effectively as part of the group. Norming ultimately determines the ability of a group to cooperate. In line with the experiential education training, which we conducted in preparation for the camp, we planned an experiential tour for the Norming phase under the theme "Save Demotopia."

The idea behind "Save Demotopia" was an experiential learning rally through the surroundings of our accommodation. We selected five experiential learning games and two puzzles[3] for this. A map of the area was created so that groups could navigate to the different tasks. At each station, the facilitator provided the task instructions (using the methods described below). At the end, all groups returned to the accommodation, where they completed a final task together. Each group was supported by one educator/youth worker.

We also developed a storyline to match the camp's theme for the day:

The authoritarian forces are slowly advancing into northern Germany. A group of them has made it to the island and tracked you down! They are trying everything to sabotage the community you have built. While you were fleeing, the group was split up and you are now trying to navigate the island in small teams. To get back to safety, each team must solve ___ tasks and ___ puzzles. You will receive ____ points for completing these.

Once you have shaken off your pursuers, everyone returns here to complete the final task together, which will secure your safety once and for all. To succeed, all groups must collectively achieve at least ____ points.

↳

Connection to democracy
The rally playfully demonstrates that democratic communities can only exist through collaboration and mutual support. Participants experience that their different strengths, ideas, and decisions matter and contribute to the success of the entire group. At the same time, the storyline conveys that democracy is not guaranteed and must be protected through joint, responsible action.

3 We researched the puzzles on the internet and included the links at the relevant points in the instructions and in the list of sources. Unfortunately the puzzles are in German and only one of the puzzles (Crack the Code!) is translatable. For the "Escape Adventure" we offer helpful links and suggest you look online for a puzzle that suits your group. Feel free to contact us at kontakt@bueroblau.de if you have any additional questions.

4.3.1 Experiential Education Games

The following four experiential education games were introduced to us by Leander Vierheilig during our experiential learning training course. We selected them for the rallye because they integrate well into the Demotopia storyline and, in the spirit of the Norming phase, require cooperation and effective communication from the group. Moreover, these games make a sense of trust tangible – as participants overcome challenging tasks together, they experience self-efficacy and team spirit.

Water Pipe

Number of participants
approx. 10–20 participants

Duration
approx. 10–25 minutes

Materials
a long pipe / tube with holes, which is closed at the bottom (large enough to fit a tennis ball), tennis ball, bucket or basin with water, cup

Preparation
prepare the pipe if necessary

Scenario

A pipe with holes which is closed at the bottom is placed on a bench, table, or the floor. A tennis ball is inside the pipe. The group must use water to get the tennis ball out of the pipe.

↳

Goal

The group's task is to fill the pipe with water using a cup so that the ball floats to the top. Once the ball reaches the top, it can be grabbed by hand, and the task is successfully completed.

Rules

Due to the many holes in the pipe, water is lost – the group must cover up and plug as many holes as possible with their fingers, toes, knees and any other body parts.

Another challenge: the water supply is limited. Depending on the size of the pipe, about three buckets with roughly ten liters each are suitable.

Score: ___ Points

Stranded

Number of participants
approx. 10–20 participants

Duration
approx. 30–45 minutes

Materials
1 tent, blindfolds for half of the group

Preparation
none

Scenario
The escape was difficult, but fortunately everyone survived. However, half of the participants can no longer see. The remaining participants have injured their hands. In front of you lies a packed tent that can protect you from the authoritarian forces.

↳

Goal
The team must set up the tent so that it is fully functional. The goal is reached when all blind team members are seated inside the tent.

Rules
- At least half of the team members are blindfolded during the exercise.
- The sighted team members are not allowed to touch the tent material (hands must remain behind their backs).
- The tent may only be assembled through verbal instructions from the sighted members to the blindfolded team members.
- In the end, all blindfolded participants must be seated inside the closed tent.

Caution: Be careful when using the tent poles!

Score: ___ Points

The Web

Number of participants
approx. 10–20 participants

Duration
approx. 30–40 minutes

Materials
1 rope (min. 25 meters)

Preparation
none

Scenario
A spider's web blocks the way. The only option is to carefully climb through it without touching it. Only then will the spider hopefully remain unaware of you!

↳

Goal
Participants construct a web between two trees using the rope. All participants start on the same side of the web. Every group member must get to the other side through the web's openings.

Rules
- The space for the web and the trees are assigned.
- The openings / loops are created solely using the rope.
- Each opening / loop in the web may only be used by one person.
- Crawling underneath the web is not allowed.
- If the rope is touched (even by helping participants), everyone must return to the starting side and start over.
- Restarts are allowed as often as needed.

Safety: Everyone is responsible for safety!
Do not jump through the net or attempt to throw anyone through the net.

Score: ___ Points

Sandstorm

Number of participants
approx. 10–20 participants

Duration
approx. 25–40 minutes

Materials
blindfolds for all participants, an object to retrieve, a rope

Preparation
none

Scenario

The group has taken shelter from a sandstorm in a protected area. Unfortunately, an important object was left behind along the way.

↳

Goal

The team must retrieve an object about 40 meters away. Afterwards, all team members must reach a second point in the area, previously designated and marked by the facilitator. As soon as one team member leaves the starting point, everyone becomes blindfolded.

Rules

- The group may inspect the area from the starting point and devise strategies to solve the task.
- Once any participant leaves the starting point, all team members are blindfolded.
- A rope may be used for the team members to connect to each other.
- Blindfolds can only be removed once all participants have reached the marked target point.
- If any blindfold is removed before reaching the target, the task is considered not accomplished.

Score: ___ Points

4.3.2 Puzzles

In addition to the experiential education games, we suggest two puzzles. These also have an “adventure” character and therefore fit well with the storyline of the rally. Unlike the previously introduced games, the puzzles do not require movement or coordination in space; instead, they call for logical thinking and collaborative problem-solving. They can therefore be conducted indoors and promote a slightly different set of skills. Nevertheless, the focus here is also on communication and effective collaboration within the group – thereby supporting the group processes during the Norming phase.

Crack the Code!

Number of participants
approx. 3–5 participants per team

Duration
approx. 10–20 minutes

Materials
per team: printed puzzle, optional chest / box with a 3-digit combination lock, optional paper and pens for notes and writing down the solution (if played without combination locks)

Preparation
print puzzles, optionally set combination locks (see solution), optionally place a hint for the “Escape Adventure” or some small prize (e.g. sweets)

Scenario

A chest containing important documents is locked. The teams must find a three-digit code to open the chest.

The Code

6 | 8 | 2
One number is correct and in the right position.

6 | 1 | 4
One number is correct but in the wrong position.

2 | 0 | 6
Two numbers are correct and in the wrong position.

7 | 3 | 8
Nothing is right.

8 | 7 | 0
One number is correct but in the wrong position.

Find the right number combination and crack the code!

Solution: 042

Score: ___ Points

Escape Adventure

For this puzzle we chose a free printable escape game online, which combines a treasure map which has to be folded and puzzled in the right way to lift its secrets with other small challenges - in order to produce a professional looking short but fun “Escape Adventure”. Unfortunately the instructions and materials for this specific puzzle are only available in German. We therefore suggest that you look online for a similar puzzle, which fits your group and the language you speak.

Some helpful links as a starting point for your research might include:

- More than 40 different puzzle ideas which can be combined to create an “Escape Game”, some with printable templates: https://teambuilding.com/blog/escape-room-puzzles
- A fully constructed free and printable escape room game, which is, however, quite specific and would probably need to be adapted to be more easily realisable: https://www.mypartygames.com/free-printable-escape-room-game-mansion-mystery/

In case you want to have a look at the “Escape Adventure” we used (and speak German):
https://escaperoomspiele.com/7-min-escape-adventure/7min-anleitung/

Regardless of the puzzle you chose, we suggest you split the group up into smaller teams, allow enough time, and think of a creative way to fit the puzzle into your story line. To create a sense of accomplishment, we also suggest you provide some kind of a “treasure” to be discovered at the end.

4.3.3 Final Joint Challenge: Moor Path

Number of participants
approx. 10–20 participants

Duration
approx. 20–40 minutes

Materials
25 mats ("Moor path stones"), optional ropes to mark the moor

Preparation
mark the "moor" area

Scenario
You've made it this far! On the other side of the moor lies safe Demotopia, where the authoritarian forces can no longer reach you! However, the path is not without danger. You must not touch the ground, or you will sink into the moor. For the points you have achieved so far, you receive Moor path stones, which you must always stay in contact with – otherwise, they will sink immediately.

↳

Goal
All participants must cross the moor without touching the ground.

Rules
- Each Moor path stone is worth ____ points.
- If the ground is touched, the person must return to the start.
- The Moor path stones can be picked up and passed forward to help others cross.

Score: ___ Points

Variations
— It is very windy: participants must all stay in contact so no one gets blown away by the storm.
— There is a time limit.
— Some participants are blindfolded.
— All Moor path stones must be carried to the other side of the moor.

4.4 Performing: Strengthening Self-Efficacy and Co-Creation

In the Performing phase, the group's full potential is revealed. After clarifying roles, building trust, and working through initial conflicts, the participants now take charge for group tasks and collaborate cooperatively. They contribute their individual strengths, make decisions collectively, and assume responsibility for the success of group processes. Experiential education challenges are no longer just dealt with, they are actively shaped – highlighting self-efficacy, team spirit, and social skills.

The theatre method we had planned for this day could not be implemented because we were unable to guide the group successfully into the Performing phase. However, individual youth workers from the project consortium have had very positive experiences with this method, as it encourages participants to change their perspective. Therefore, we have included it in this handbook. Additionally, we present a revised version of the "Take a Step Forward", or "Privilege Walk", method - a classic in political education aimed at raising awareness of privilege and discrimination.

Warm-Up: Changing Perspective – My Life as a Victim, My Life as a Hero

Number of participants
any

Duration
approx. 15 minutes

Materials
optional pens and paper

Preparation
none

Instructions
Depending on the group, it may make sense for all participants to first take some time individually to make notes. Here, the facilitator should ask participants to reflect on their life story: What were important milestones in their life so far? What has shaped them the most?

Next, the facilitator can provide prompts for the two perspectives (victim and hero): How would a person who perceives everything from a victim's perspective tell the participants' life story? The victim perspective can include, for example: being a victim of discrimination, societal pressure to perform, economic inequality, etc.

Then participants should adopt the perspective of a hero: How would a person who sees themselves as a hero tell the same life story?

Now the group forms pairs. In teams of two the participants take turns sharing their life story with each other. In the first round, they take the perspective of a victim, telling their story from the viewpoint of someone who perceives themselves as a victim (e.g., of discrimination or societal pressure). Afterwards, they switch perspectives. Now they reinterpret the key milestones of their personal biography as a different story: that of a hero.

The exercise serves two purposes: to introduce the medium of storytelling and to show participants how the same biographical elements can form two completely different stories with different messages.

! **CAUTION: This method is very profound and not suitable for all contexts. Depending on the group and situation, it may be more appropriate for participants to select one or two situations to tell from the victim or hero perspective rather than their entire life story.**

Theatre

Number of participants
any – but must fit the selected play

Duration
flexible – we planned a full day for this, allowing time for costumes and stage design

Materials
theatre stories, pens and paper, optional costume box

Preparation
select and, if necessary, shorten suitable stories; prepare costumes matching the stories

For this method, we preselected three stories[4] that convey various political-democratic aspects. The stories were also shortened in order to suit the purpose of this exercise. Beyond the content of the story, the guided change of perspective is the democratic competency this method focuses on.

Instruction

Written summaries of the stories are provided to the group. The large group is divided into teams (each with approx. 10 people). Each team chooses a story they want to perform.

All members of each team read the summary of their chosen story. Then, the team decides together who takes which role in the play. Next, each participant writes the story down from the perspective of their assigned role. It is important to describe only what their character experiences and perceives (e.g., from the story Momo: Girolamo experiences and sees different things than Bebbo the street sweeper). Then each participant presents their view of the story (through the eyes of their character) to the other members of the their team. Finally, the team pieces together the different perspectives into a joint theatre performance in which all roles are included. Afterwards, they perform the play for the rest of the group.

Possible Learning Outcomes

Participants engage deeply with different perspectives by thinking through roles, interpreting them individually, and integrating them into a collective performance. They experience that every role – regardless of power, visibility, or influence – has its own reality and significance within the story. Through perspective-taking, participants practice empathy, strengthen their expressive abilities, and explore creative, cooperative problem-solving. Working on the play together and the joint performance foster teamwork, compromise, and the understanding that diverse perspectives can create a unified whole.

4 We selected and adapted the stories “Momo ”, “Lord of the Flies” and “Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee” (a German novel / film). You can either prepare the same stories, so that they are shortened and adapted in a way which fits the purpose of the theatre exercise, or you can choose different stories, perhaps from your local context. Usually, summaries of stories are available online, which offer a good basis for the document you develop.

↳

Connection to Democracy

This method strengthens democratic competencies such as perspective-taking, empathy, negotiation, and participation. It demonstrates that in a democracy, multiple viewpoints and life realities coexist and must be acknowledged to reach fair and inclusive decisions. By giving all roles space in the theatre performance, it symbolically emphasizes that in a democratic society, every voice counts.

Take a Step Forward

Number of participants
approx. 10–30 participants

Duration
approx. 60 Minuten

Materials
printed role cards

Preparation
prepare role cards; printable role cards are available at https://star-e.icja.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Take-a-Step-Forward-Role-Cards.pdf

Instructions

Participants each receive a role card, which they must not show or reveal to anyone else. The facilitator first asks several questions to all players at once, helping them familiarize themselves with their assigned role. Enough time should be given for the participants to think between questions. It can be helpful for participants to take some brief notes about their answers.

Possible prompts and questions to develop the role:
We are in Germany[5]. Imagine what life in your role has been like so far:

- What were your parents like?
- How and where did you grow up?
- What hobbies do you have? What do you work as?
- What kind of friends do you have, and what do you do together?
- How do you live?
- How much money do you earn?
- What scares you?
- What makes you happy?

Next, participants line up in a row. The facilitator now asks a series of Yes/No questions (depending on available time, about 10–20 questions). If participants feel they could answer “Yes” from the perspective of their role, they take one step forward. If they are unsure or the answer is “No,” they remain in place.

Possible questions:

1. Have you never had serious money problems?
2. Do you feel that you can freely express your opinion and that you are taken seriously?
3. Have you never been afraid to be stopped by the police for a control?
4. Are you insured or have access to medical care in case of illness?
5. Can you afford an annual vacation?
6. Can you pursue the career you want?
7. Have you never been afraid to fall asleep at night?
8. Can you fall in love with whoever you want?
9. Can you visit any pub or club without difficulty?
10. Can you read and write?
11. Have you never felt excluded by others?
12. Are you attending a school appropriate to your abilities?
13. Can you communicate easily with your surroundings?

5 We used Germany as a mental setting for this game - we suggest you adapt this to your local context.

14. Can you move independently and safely throughout your area/city?
15. Do you feel your religion and language are respected in your society?
16. Are you looking forward to the next day?
17. Can you express your political opinion without fear of negative consequences?
18. Do you have access to the Internet?
19. Do you know where to turn if you need advice or help?
20. Can you regularly buy new clothing?

Debrief and Evaluation

After all questions have been asked, participants look around the room. Where are they standing? How many participants are at the same level? Who is standing alone? Before the evaluation, participants "shake off" their roles by shaking out arms and legs and rubbing their arms in a gesture to let go of role. Afterwards, the participants can sit in a circle. Some participants might read their role cards aloud. How easy or difficult was it for them to empathize with their role and answer the questions?

Possible further evaluation questions:

- How did it feel to step forward or stay behind?
- Did anyone not manage to step forward at all?
- Did those who stepped forward notice they were sometimes alone?
- How did those at the back feel? How about those at the front?
- Who felt particularly disadvantaged?
- What prevented them from taking a step forward?
- What structural or societal problems do participants identify?
- In what ways does the exercise reflect reality?
- What opportunities do different groups or individuals have to change their situation? What are they unable to influence?

4.5 Adjourning: Reflection, Transfer, and Farewell

In the Adjourning phase, the focus is on consciously closing the shared journey. The group looks back on what has been experienced, acknowledges successes and learning processes, and says goodbye – not only to each other but also to the intense group experience itself. Guided reflection sessions, rituals, and feedback rounds make personal development visible and help to anchor it sustainably. This phase is emotionally charged and provides space to integrate the experience and return to everyday life with a strengthened sense of self.

For this purpose, we gathered in a circle and began with feedback through a spatial arrangement exercise in the room, asking participants to evaluate the evening session. The young people positioned themselves along the poles “good” and “bad” in the room and explained their positions if they wished to share (described in ↪ **section 2.5**).

After everyone who wanted to had spoken, each participant received three cards: green (what went well), yellow (what I would change), and red (what was bad). These allowed participants to give written and anonymous feedback about the entire week.

Additionally, the educators distributed chains/bracelets with a compass pendant to the participants. The compass, which was also a symbol found throughout the site of the youth hostel, was meant to serve as a reminder of the shared time together.

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