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D-EFFECT - CIVIC SOCIETY DEMOCRACY LESSONS, bringing a youth perspective in the EU policymaking at all levels in line with Youth Strategy 2022-2027



THE YOUTH DEMOCRATIC FESTIVAL FRAMEWORK



**8 SIMPLE STEPS OF ACTIVE CIVIC PARTICIPATION
METHODS**



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THE YOUTH DEMOCRATIC FESTIVAL FRAMEWORK

8 SIMPLE STEPS OF ACTIVE CIVIC PARTICIPATION METHODS

Introduction

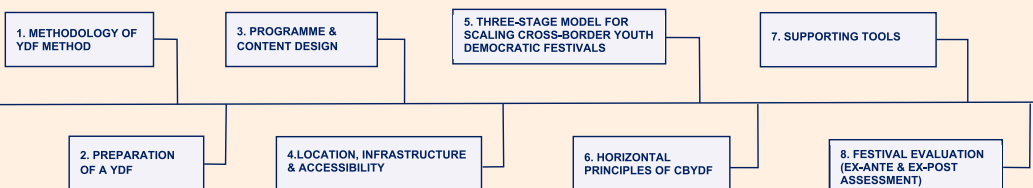
There are two complementary ways to organise Youth Democratic Festivals:

1. **Cross-Border Youth Democratic Festivals (CBYDF)** international in scope, connecting participants across regions and countries.
2. **Youth Democratic Local Festivals (YDLF)** are rooted in local communities, focusing on issues that matter most at the municipal or regional level.

For simplicity, both forms are referred to as **Youth Democratic Festivals (YDF)** in this document.

YDFs are an innovative way to engage young people in democracy. Developed through the D-EFFECT initiative and funded by the INTERREG South Baltic Programme, they are youth-driven events that connect local priorities with European values. More than just gatherings, YDFs are platforms for dialogue, participation, and co-creation. They give young people the tools and confidence to shape the future of their towns and regions. The model is flexible yet structured, making democracy accessible, engaging, and meaningful.

By combining participatory methods, cross-border learning, and creative design, these festivals build experiences that last and foster long-term civic engagement. Whether you are a municipality, youth organisation, educator, or policymaker, YDFs provide a practical and inspiring way to bring young voices into democratic life and strengthen communities.



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1. METHODOLOGY OF THE YDF

The YDF is a fresh way of bringing communities together. It builds on participation, dialogue, and collaboration, and creates space for different generations and sectors to meet and exchange ideas. Each festival focuses on the themes that matter most to the local community.

At the heart of YDF are young people aged 6 to 30. They take the lead in planning, organising, and evaluating the festival. Adults are there as mentors and advisors, but the focus remains on youth-driven ideas, creativity, and co-creation.

The format draws inspiration from Europe's most inclusive civic gatherings, such as Almedalsveckan in Sweden, Arendalsuka in Norway, Folkemødet in Denmark, SuomiAreena in Finland, LAMPA in Latvia, and Arvamusfestival in Estonia. YDF brings this spirit into local and regional contexts, creating spaces where young people, communities, and decision-makers meet to shape ideas and build solutions together.



What Makes YDF Unique

The YDF brings the energy and openness of Europe's big civic festivals into local and regional communities. What makes it special is the strong focus on youth leadership. Unlike large, national events, YDFs are built to be practical, accessible, and close to people. They give young people the chance not just to take part, but to shape the conversation, build democratic skills, and create lasting platforms for engagement.

At the core of every YDF is a simple goal: empower young people and increase participation. These festivals strengthen youth agency, encourage co-decision-making, and foster collaboration across generations and sectors. They are events by young people, for the whole community.

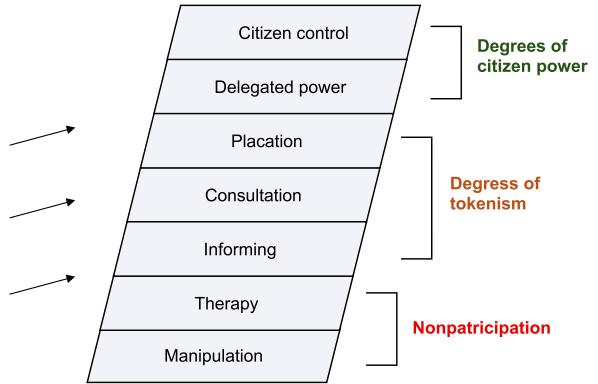
YDFs are also connected to a bigger picture. They follow the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, which promotes youth participation, civic engagement, and equal access to opportunities. Each festival builds on the 11 European Youth Goals, adapting them to local priorities and challenges, so that European principles turn into real, community-led action.

Citizen Participation

Every YDF starts with one idea: active participation. It's about giving young people a real voice in shaping their communities through dialogue, collaboration, and hands-on activities.

YDF makes civic engagement accessible, interactive, and meaningful. It turns abstract ideas about democracy into experiences that everyone can take part in and carry forward.

FORMS OF PARTICIPATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Petitions, referendum - Citizens' or neighbourhood budgets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Round tables, planning workshops, neighbourhood committees, citizens' committees, citizens' forums
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Citizens' reports, neighbourhood pacts, arbitration and moderation procedures, district or neighbourhood management



Source: Sackmann (2014): 5-11; Schuldt & Mumenthaler (2017)

ADVANTAGES OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION		
	ADVANTAGES TO CITIZEN PARTICIPANTS	ADVANTAGES TO INITIATORS
DECISION PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education - Persuade decision-makers - Gain skills for active / democratic citizenship - Self-efficacy experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education - Persuade citizens - Build strategic alliances - Gain legitimacy of and acceptance towards decisions
OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trust in political procedures - Better policy and implementation decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Break gridlock; achieve outcomes - Better policy and implementation decisions - Citizen compliance - Social capital

Source: Developed by Marcin Żuchowski (Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic)

DISADVANTAGES OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION		
	DISADVANTAGES TO CITIZEN PARTICIPANTS	DISADVANTAGES TO INITIATORS
DECISION PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time consuming (even dull) - Pointless if decision is ignored - Loss of trust in political procedures - Perception that their voices are being manipulated - Disenchantment with politics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time-consuming - Costly - May 'backfire' and create hostility towards (policy) change - Disenchantment with politics
OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Worse policy decision if heavily influenced by opposing interest groups or 'loud minorities' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of decision-making control - Possibility of a bad decision that is hard to ignore - Less budget for implementation - Less compliance

Source: Developed by Marcin Żuchowski (Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic)

Why YDF?

YDF stands out because they combine dialogue, learning, and action in an open and inclusive way. It gives young people the chance to participate and co-create, building lasting democratic skills while strengthening connections between youth, communities, and local institutions.

Impact and Long-Term Goals

1. **Build Democratic Skills** – YDF offers young people practical tools, from debating and critical thinking to understanding civic responsibility.
2. **Create Ongoing Dialogue** – Festivals are recurring events that keep dialogue maintained and encourage active participation.
3. **Strengthen Community Ties** – YDF brings closer collaboration between youth, public authorities and civil society.
4. **Promote Active Citizenship** – showing young people that their voices truly shape real decisions in their communities.



2. PREPARING A YOUTH DEMOCRATIC FESTIVAL

Organizing a YDF requires key elements to ensure success:

1. **Political Support**
 - Active involvement from local authorities and decision-makers.
2. **Financial Resources**
 - A budget to cover logistics, venues, materials, and activities.
3. **Human Resources**
 - Organizers, team members, and volunteers to plan and run the festival.
4. **Administrative & Technical Support**
 - Handling permits, safety, healthcare, and security arrangements.
5. **Promotion & Communication**
 - Outreach to engage the community and raise visibility.

Participants at the Heart of YDF

The success of every YDF depends on its participants. Their active involvement is what brings the festival's democratic values to life. YDFs focus on co-creation and shared responsibility. Young people are not just for participation, instead they are co-organisers in shaping the festival from start to finish.

Key considerations include:

1. Who takes part, and what roles will they be involved in?
2. How can we ensure participation is meaningful and equal?
3. How do we build connections and shared responsibility among participants?
4. What makes the festival inclusive, accessible, and relevant?

This approach creates open dialogue between youth, institutions, and civil society, making a truly collaborative and empowering experience.

To support balanced and inclusive participation, YDF participants' events can be grouped into three complementary categories. Each contributing in their unique way to design, implementation, and impact of the festival experience:

CATEGORY	WHO THEY ARE?	FUNCTION IN THE FESTIVAL:	WHY ENGAGE THEM?
A. Policy Creators	Local, national, and EU-level policymakers, elected officials, and representatives of public institutions (e.g. indirect beneficiaries whose involvement reinforces democratic legitimacy and broadens public visibility)	Participate in high-level discussions, share perspectives, engage in intergenerational dialogue, and demonstrate institutional support	Enhance credibility and visibility of the festival, support democratic values, and bridge policy with grassroots initiatives
B. Youth Support Environment	Representatives of local authorities (e.g. municipal politicians, community heads), public officials working in youth-related fields, adult youth experts, researchers, educators, youth workers, youth organization staff, parents, mentors, and democratic activists (direct stakeholders supporting implementation)	Contribute to festival logistics, facilitate workshops, moderate sessions, support youth participants, and ensure the quality, safety, and inclusiveness of activities	Provide institutional continuity, build capacity, and help embed the festival into broader community and policy structures
C. Youth and NGO	Youth leaders (e.g. local youth representatives and activists), municipal and commune youth councils, youth-oriented NGOs, formal and informal youth groups, young residents, local action groups, and volunteers (final beneficiaries of the festival)	Co-design festival content, lead discussions and workshops, perform civic and creative activities, and represent youth perspectives	Foster youth leadership, creativity, and ownership; strengthen grassroots civic engagement and long-term participation in democratic life

Source: Developed by Svetlana Saidensal (Wisnar University)

3. PROGRAMME & CONTENT DESIGN

The festival programme shapes the themes, activities, and interactions of a YDF, turning democratic values into action.

To create meaningful engagement, the programme should:

1. Reflect democratic values and the festival's objectives.
2. Include diverse, inclusive formats for all participant groups.
3. Support youth-led initiatives, encouraging bottom-up content creation.

The diagram illustrates potential event formats for the Cross-border Youth Democratic Festival.



Source: Developed by Svetlana Saidensal (Wismar University)

Planning the Programme

When designing a YDF programme, consider the following:

1. How can the festival encourage cross-border exchange and collaboration?
2. Is there an overarching theme to guide the festival?
3. How many zones or stages are needed for different activities?
4. Which formats will best engage diverse participant groups?
5. Should there be dedicated tracks for school youth, university students, or local communities?

These questions help create a meaningful, relevant programme that reflects current youth, social, and cross-border priorities.

YDF encompasses a wide range of proposals regarding the forms that may be part of the festival – which can be grouped into five categories, including:

- Educational and informational workshops and seminars: Focusing on democratic values, civil rights, the electoral process and the importance of voting, opportunities for youth participation, and co-decision-making;
- Aspects of cross-sector and intergenerational dialogue: Through discussion panels, debates, and public speeches;
- Interactive participant activities: Including “hot seat” interviews, couch conversations, television interviews with journalists, role-playing game presentations (e.g., mock elections), simulations of local councils and youth parliaments;
- Cultural and artistic activities: Incorporating music, art, and creative expression to make the festival dynamic and appealing to a young audience, competitions, and exhibitions;
- Creating spaces for networking and local community dialogue: Providing youth with opportunities to connect with decision-makers, NGOs, and local leaders, political stand-ups, open microphones, and voting.

Type	Examples
Speeches & Talks	Keynotes, speed talks, lectures, seminars
Panels & Discussions	Panels, open mics
Interviews	Hot seat, couch talks, TV interviews
Workshops	Workshops, dilemma games
Cultural & Artistic	Concerts, theater, stand-ups, exhibitions, installations
Outdoor & Pop-up	Street pop-ups, demos, walking tours
Social & Networking	Drinks, meetups, speed dating, Youth Market
Sports	Competitions
Interactive	Living library, voting

4. LOCATION, INFRASTRUCTURE & ACCESSIBILITY

The location of a YDF is more than just logistics; it shapes participation, visibility, and local impact. A well-chosen venue reinforces the festival's democratic, inclusive, and cross-border character.

Key considerations:

1. **Cross-border relevance:** Choose cities or regions that symbolize cooperation and youth exchange.
2. **Local engagement:** Small or mid-sized towns help strengthen community ties.
3. **Accessibility:** Venues should be physically, linguistically, and digitally inclusive.
4. **Transport & accommodation:** Easy access for international participants and affordable local stays.
5. **Indoor & outdoor flexibility:** Spaces for diverse activities and weather resilience.
6. **Safety & readiness:** Clear protocols, emergency plans, and inclusive infrastructure.

5. THREE-STAGE MODEL FOR SCALING CROSS-BORDER YOUTH DEMOCRATIC FESTIVALS

To support systematic scaling and adaptability, the CBYDF methodology follows a three-stage implementation model:

Stage 1 – Small-scale Local Youth Pilot Festival

- **Requirements:** at least 50 participants, involvement of local youth, stakeholders, and target groups.
- **Focus:** community-specific event to test the YDF concept, build trust, and identify best practices.
- **Suggested topics:** local youth challenges and community problems.

Stage 2 – Medium-sized Youth Democratic Festival with National or Foreign Partners

- **Requirements:** at least 100 participants, collaboration with local, regional, and national stakeholders, plus at least one foreign partner
- **Focus:** extending beyond the local level, inviting participants from outside the community, fostering co-learning and knowledge exchange.
- **Suggested topics:** regional or national youth-related problems.

Stage 3 – Large-scale Transnational Youth Democratic Festival

- **Requirements:** 200+ participants, participation of a wide range of stakeholders and at least one international organisation.
- **Focus:** providing an international context, broadening the thematic areas, and establishing a regional platform for democratic participation.
- **Suggested topics:** transnational youth issues and challenges.

6. HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES OF YDF

Core values guiding inclusive, democratic, and sustainable youth festivals:

1. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND NON-DISCRIMINATION	2. GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER PERSPECTIVE	3. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND 'DO NO SIGNIFICANT HARM' PRINCIPLE
<p>Festivals must be open to individuals of all backgrounds, with particular attention to the inclusion of people at risk of exclusion, such as persons with disabilities or minority groups.</p> <p>This principle applies across all dimensions of the festival—from physical accessibility and communication formats to outreach and engagement strategies. Creating a safe, inclusive space is essential to meaningful dialogue and democratic participation.</p>	<p>CBYDF promotes equal participation of women, men, and non-binary individuals in all roles and decision-making processes. Gender equality is not only a policy requirement but also a democratic value that strengthens the legitimacy and relevance of youth participation.</p> <p>Involving diverse gender perspectives helps ensure that discussions and outcomes reflect the realities of all young people and that the festival becomes a space for empowerment and mutual respect.</p>	<p>CBYDF is committed to reducing its ecological footprint and supporting environmental awareness. Festivals should model sustainable practices and promote climate-conscious behaviours among participants.</p> <p>This includes reducing waste, choosing low-impact transport, and integrating sustainability into festival content. Environmental responsibility is seen not just as a logistical issue, but as a topic for civic dialogue and youth action.</p>
<p>Key actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Inclusive communication and venue design ◆ Opportunities for both online and offline participation ◆ Clear code of conduct promoting respect and diversity 	<p>Key actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Balanced gender representation in programme and leadership ◆ Gender-sensitive language and materials ◆ Dedicated spaces for dialogue on gender-related issues 	<p>Key actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use of digital tools and hybrid formats ◆ Sustainable event logistics ◆ Integration of climate-related topics into sessions

Source: Developed by Svetlana Saidensal (Wismar University)

7. SUPPORTING TOOLS

• **Round Table Meetings:**

Structured discussions that bring together youth, local authorities, civil society, and other stakeholders. These create equal space for participation and help set the agenda. A great way to start is with the World Café method, which encourages open dialogue, idea-sharing, and collective problem-solving.

• **Live Lessons in Democracy:**

Interactive formats like simulations, debates, or role-playing help young people experience democracy firsthand. They can also include visits to democratic institutions such as parliaments, ombudsman offices, or youth councils, giving participants a real insight into how democracy works in practice.

• **Participation in Political Festivals around Europe**

Allows youth and stakeholders to see democratic practices in action. These festivals provide open spaces for dialogue, exchange, and civic engagement, inspiring new ideas and collaboration.



8. FESTIVAL EVALUATION (EX-ANTE & EX-POST ASSESSMENT)

Evaluation is a key element of the YDF cycle, ensuring both accountability and continuous improvement. It is carried out in two complementary stages:

1. Ex-ante Assessment

Conducted before the festival to define clear objectives, understand participants' expectations, and identify potential risks or challenges. This stage helps align the festival's design with the needs of the target groups..

2. Ex-post Assessment

Conducted after the festival to measure outcomes, assess inclusiveness, capture participant feedback, and document lessons learned. The ex-post review includes several dimension:

3. Self-Assessment (by the organiser):

Verification of goals achieved, inclusion of target groups, identification of emerging problems, and areas for improvement in logistics, programme content, and youth engagement.

4. Peer-to-Peer Review (by another partner):

Independent reflection on the event using a simple SWOT analysis, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, as well as providing recommendations.

By linking these two stages, evaluation creates a continuous feedback loop that not only monitors the quality of each festival but also supports the long-term development and refinement of the YDF model.



Conclusion: Making Youth Democratic Festivals a Success

To create a successful YDF:

1. Plan With Youth, Not Just For Youth:

Involve young people in shaping the concept, programme, and evaluation.

2. Offer Diverse Programming:

Combine educational, cultural, and interactive activities to engage all interests and backgrounds.

3. Build Momentum:

Continues engagement through post-festival activities like youth councils, workshops, or local initiatives.

By following this approach and drawing inspiration from successful festivals across Europe, local YDFs in the South Baltic Area can nurture a new generation of informed, engaged, and active citizens.





YOUTH DEMOCRATIC FESTIVAL METHOD HELPDESK

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