Democratic decision-making processes

Based on the ‘Betzavta’-approach

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1. Facets of Democracy Competence

I. Democracy competence 360 °

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity and Culture</th>
<th>Difference</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Considering myself</td>
<td>Considering the Others</td>
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<tr>
<th>Power Structures</th>
<th>Change</th>
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<td>Considering the Whole</td>
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Model developed by the Academy Leadership & Competence 2012-2015 (www.cap-akademie.de)

1 Handout based on Betzavta. Further information can be found at www.mehralseinedemokratie.de
Dealing democratically with conflicts and coming to decisions which are satisfactory for the participants, involves more than a specific method or technical steps to take. It involves the development of a democratic attitude which involves critical self-reflection, the awareness for the need of others, individual and structural analysis of different dimensions of a conflict and the preparedness for creative change, questioning limits of the status quo.

Training this will lead to democracy competence; we are aligning this concept with the European Union which has switched the complete educational area in Europe from input-driven learning to outcomes which stress the active part of learners\(^2\) and defines competence as ‘taking over responsibility and autonomy’.

When looking at democracy competence, we have to develop a comprehensive view if we do not want to limit democracy to something narrow. Democracy has to do with myself, the way I respect my needs, my individuality and my role in society. I have to become aware of my identity as a human being and of my collective ‘culture’, aspects that connect me with others.

At the same time I have to realize difference between me and others. I have to consider others with their identity and culture at an equal level. Even more, I have to realize, that my identity is dependent on the identity of others. I can define myself e.g. as secular when I perceive others to be religious, I might define myself as holding up traditional culture when I observe others giving up traditions I respect a lot.

These two aspects of democracy are often seen as the ‘nice’ ones: we can share and respect our individuality and celebrate diversity together and deal with each other in a ‘democratic’ way.

Going on another level we have to consider structures which are often structures of power and discrimination. These structures are often limiting democracy often to those with privileges, neglecting democracy to the powerless (in the sense of being able to actively participate). Therefore we have to consider the whole and realize that each society has intended or unintended systems and structures of exclusion (e.g. of women, certain religions, social classes, people with other ethnic background etc...). We have to understand that democracy really depends on understanding the logic of these often invisible mechanisms.

A fourth aspect is crucial: when considering power structures, we can be easily overwhelmed as individuals. Therefore a comprehensive view on democracy means finding creative ways of questioning the limits and achieving change. This can be done by looking for unusual ways of questioning or breaking the logic of system, going unusual ways and actively using spaces that are there. Often we have ‘assumptions about limits’ that turn out not to be true. Democracy in this way can be understood as a creative way of resistance enabling societal change.

Democracy competence means that we are constantly on the move, in a process of questioning rather than confirmation. Democracy competence means upholding the lasting potential of democracy. Or as Jacques Derrida put it:

“For democracy remains to come; this is the essence in so far as it remains: not only will it remain infinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come.”\(^3\)

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### A comprehensive view on Democracy

Four important perspectives that need to be kept in balance

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<td><strong>Identity and Culture</strong></td>
<td><strong>Difference</strong></td>
<td><strong>Power Structures</strong></td>
<td><strong>Achieving change</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realizing one's own individual and social identity (culture).</td>
<td>Recognizing the needs, values and feelings of others as equally valid.</td>
<td>Realizing the context of a situation or a concrete action: Structures (frame conditions, implicit rules), differences in power, possible discrimination.</td>
<td>Questioning everything considering the whole-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being aware of one's own interests and of the needs, values and feelings behind.</td>
<td>Realizing the individual and social identity of others.</td>
<td>Reflecting assumptions, prejudices and dilemmas in situations of conflict.</td>
<td>Questioning frame conditions and implicit criteria for value judgements of a system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflecting on one's role in an actual situation with others.</td>
<td>Realizing the constitution of one's own identity through the identity of others.</td>
<td>Realizing the logic of a social or societal system – its preconditions and implications.</td>
<td>Redefining a situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging the responsibility for one's own behavior and interests.</td>
<td>Taking into account diversity and difference as a chance for being at the eye level.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Realizing the freedom for creative change of context and system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing self-confidence and awareness.</td>
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<td>Seeking alternatives and implementing them.</td>
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*Model developed by the Academy Leadership & Competence 2012-2015*

### Working with the concept

Ask participants to do a self-assessment: they should individually draw a circle and ask themselves in which of the four sections they have a wide view and where it is rather narrow. Some people have a comprehensive view on power structures, but do not see the needs of others. Some people are activists ready for any change but forget about their own identity and role. Others might always see individual differences, forgetting about the power structures in place. So participants can draw their individual circle with varying percentages of the four sections. Ask them to find a concrete example for each sections: where did they concretely consider democracy in this section in their professional and private life?

Let participants get up from their chairs for the section they have the widest view. Combine participants with different views and let them exchange their resources – they can support each other in the course of the training to widen their perspective on aspects of democracy they do not yet see comprehensively.

To continue, provide participants with the handout on the previous page and let them analyze cases in society in which the question of democracy is relevant.
2. Dilemmas of democracy and populism

In current discourses on democracy one can observe a division: on the one hand those who claim to know the 'right' way, trying to rhetorically defeat those they see as being 'wrong'. Populists claim to represent ‘the people’ as a whole and refute a pluralistic view on perspectives and values. Whoever is against them is claimed not to be part of the people. This anti-pluralist tendency weakens a comprehensive concept of democracy as introduced above as it shuts down individual reflection and discourse on an equal eye's level.

Democracy is about dealing with the diversity of values existing in plural societies. This values might be represented by individuals, cultural, religious, economic and other groups. Democracy means that no single value will be taken as an absolute guideline to be followed, excluding and eliminating other values. This also means that no individual or societal group can claim to represent an absolute value that should be installed for all (extremists or fundamentalists do therefore not play the democratic game but want to abolish this order of things.

The fundamental principle of opposition is key for this concept of democracy: only with opposing parties represented in a parliament, can an adequate representation and balancing of values happen. Every government needs a strong opposition which controls, balances and limits the representation of the values of those ruling. Elections and events of symbolic character regularly shift the balance of values but keep up their diversity in democracy.

Democracy as understood in this sense means the acknowledgment of essential dilemmas like freedom and intervention, unity and diversity, individuality and collectivism. These dilemmas have no pre-defined answers, but require responsible and contingent decisions within the political process. To understand and live democracy in this way may be an uneasy and irritating experience - yet it is the way to inspire the creative potential of democracy and get at a differentiation of arguments against populist rhetoric and solely technical solutions.

As a conceptual approach, what we call “duality of democracy” might be helpful to show the balancing of and also tension between competing (opposing) values of democracy. The scheme also shows how an exaggeration of one value leads to problems and negative consequences which threaten democracy itself.

The “value and development square” is a scheme that shows the “duality of democracy” involved there. It is the underlying concept of practical activities of the training programme “Betzavta” (Hebrew word for Together) and “More than one democracy”, originating from the ADAM Institute in Jerusalem, Israel, being adapted by the Center for Applied Policy Research in Munich Germany.

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4 See Müller, Jan-Werner (2016). What is populism? Philadelphia.
Duality of democracy in this sense means that there is never one absolute value which is the “democratic” one. Rather, democracy means always being involved in a tension of values with a personal responsibility to go one or the other way. It is necessary to accept the productive tension and balance between two positive values. In our example “leadership” is needed in a dual sense: responsibility has to be taken for the results to be achieved and responsibility has to be taken for the participation of important stakeholders. On the other hand no one in democracy should try to totally control stakeholders, but provide space for the value of “participation” and grant stakeholders their need for contributing actively.

If she or he exaggerates one of these values, it will come to the extremes: too much leadership will result in dictatorship, trying to control everything – stakeholders will be neglected as individuals with their own ideas, values and norms. On the other hand too much participation can result in chaos, in which stakeholders lack orientation and everything and nothing can be done.

In problematic situations we often tend to exaggerate one of the positive values; we then realize that it does not work and do an extreme jumping back and forth between the two extremes. Dictatorship is being abolished, soon chaos rules. Later the call for a strong leader might lead to new dictatorial behaviors of those ruling. This shows that democracy is a difficult path of high quality, trying to balance different values which all have their own right.

The square indicates this more demanding route of development in our example: from dictatorship

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one has to develop to participation; from chaos to leadership.

Here are some other examples of value squares showing the tensions between important democratic values and their exaggerations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diversity</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Transparency</th>
<th>Confidentiality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fragmentation</td>
<td>Segmentation</td>
<td>Endangered Security</td>
<td>Secret Regime</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Freedom of speech</th>
<th>Protection of dignity</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Grassroots activism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insult</td>
<td>Suppression</td>
<td>Elitism</td>
<td>Blind democracy</td>
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<tr>
<th>Involve minorities</th>
<th>Going ahead</th>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Laissez faire</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long processes</td>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>Total control</td>
<td>Anarchy</td>
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**Working with the concept**

The concept of duality of democracy can be used as a tool⁷ to enhance democratic dialogue; it can be used to confront populist statements while at the same time not falling into the trap of feeling superior or ‘right’ versus the populist; there is rather a balance between appreciation of the positive core of a populist statement and together looking for dilemmas involved in the statement. In this sense the following activity tries to strengthen democracy competence and fosters an understanding of the never ending processes of democracy.

**Personal dimension**

Ask participants to start personally: They should write down a problematic character trait of a person they know (e.g. not reliable; messy; too talkative…). Make them right down this word on the bottom right of a paper. Then they should think about the positive counter-value to this problematic character trait and write it down on the top left of their paper (e.g. reliable; tidy; listening…). That is

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⁷ For a comprehensive concept on confronting populism see: Boeser-Schnebel, Christian; Hufer, Klaus-Peter; Schnebel, Karin; Wenzel, Florian (2016). Politik wagen. Ein Argumentationstraining. Schwalbach / Ts.
probably also a value which they like themselves. Even graphically you see: I feel superior while the other seems to be below me.

Then they reflect what it would mean if this positive value would be exaggerated to be taken absolute. In the case of reliability this could be unflexibility/dogmatism, in the case of tidyness it could be obsession, in the case of listening it could be lack of own position. They write down this value on the left side below the positive one.

Finally one value is missing: the positive counter-value on the top right of the paper (e.g. flexible; process-oriented; outspoken...). Doing this participants can understand that each positive value needs a counterpart not to be exaggerated into a negative extreme. At the same time they have understood that the negative character trait of the other person might contain some positive core which is to be appreciated.

This does not mean that there is no conflict anymore – you probably still do not like the trait of the other. But you recognize that he or she also has a perspective which is part of a value-based dilemma. At the same time you recognize that you might be perceived as exaggerating your personal values.

Confronting the other therefore always means confronting oneself. In this way it is not so easy anymore to dissapprove of a person as such – you enter into a dialogue, trying to find common solutions which can be more creative than just winning or loosing.

**Political Dimension**

Participants now convert this idea to populist statements. Let them collect populist statements and ask them to complete a scheme accordingly which is trying to find a democratic dilemma. Here is one example. Populist statement: “Politicians are all corrupt”. The positive counter-value might be “Politicians are independent”. Now, if you exaggerate this positive value, you might end up with “Politicians take uninformed decisions”. As a positive counter-value you might say “Politicians have good networks”. On the top level a democratic dilemma between Independence and Networking becomes visible. This dilemma should be embraced, it cannot be dissolved and democracy as a process means to decide in different situations whether now independence is more important or if networking is crucial at this point.

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**Example of a populist statement**

1. “Politicians are all corrupt!”
2. “Politicians are independent”
3. “Politicians take uninformed decisions”
4. “Politicians have good networks”
3. Steps of democratic decision-making processes

When taking decisions in a democratic way, we often and quickly think about voting to find a majority. When a decision over various options for doing a project has to be taken, fingers are being raised and the “majority project” will be done. Sometimes these options are not possible, and equally quickly we offer compromises and expect others to compromise. In this way we achieve solutions which are not of the highest quality but which all agree upon. If this does not work, people and entire societies quickly ask for a strong leader who should decide to make things easier.

This approach has a number of problems:

• How do we deal with the minority that lost in a voting? They might cause trouble later.
• How do we know if the basis for voting is connected to the topic? Maybe it is rather about opposing certain people, attitudes or values and not the project itself.
• How can we be sure that compromises do not lead to mediocre forms of democracy in the long term? Always compromising might be exhausting, taking away motivation and enthusiasm.
• How do we know that an authoritarian leader will not abuse his or her power? Authority provides quick solutions but might lead to abolition of serious forms of participation in the long run.

The following approach, based on the Harvard concept of negotiation and our expansions, suggests turning things upside down a bit. Following the scheme of Theme Centered Interaction, it integrates the hidden dimensions of human life and allows for a more creative form of democracy.

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Here are five steps for Democratic Decision Taking

1. Clarifying needs.

Becoming aware of my own needs and those of others. Very often we are about to vote without knowing what we really want and need. We are involved in processes of quickly adopting a position and entering the win-or-loose game.

Needs are respected as equally valid on an existential level. The are fundamentals such as recognition, security, autonomy, stability. We are moving to the hidden dimensions of what really moves and motivates us beyond technical and factual appearances. Many conflicts in democratic decision taking are actually about “recognition”, appreciating who I am with my view of the world. This is often not even raised as an issue.

If the needs are compatible: no more conflict and a consensus is reached. If not, move to the second step.

2. Being creative.

On the basis of an recognition of existential needs as equal, there is a conflict which has been transformed from a win-or-loose game to a recognition of difference and different options within democracy (compare the approach of Duality of Democracy). Now comes the creative part: question the framework, context, setting of what has to be decided. Find alternative ways of fulfilling the needs completely without having to make someone compromise.

If successful: no more conflict, consensus is reached. If not, only then move to the next step.

3. Compromise.

Equal cutting down of fulfillment of needs. There is an important distinction: a fair compromise equally cuts down fulfillment; a foul compromise cuts down certain fulfillments more than others. Distinction between quantitative and qualitative compromise is therefore also important. Think about ways how everybody can cut his or her needs equally and fairly.

If this is possible, no more conflict, compromise is reached. If not, move to the next step.

4. Majority decision.

Only now comes the classical step of democracy as we know it. Take a vote: all votes are being counted equally, the majority will decide what will be done.

If this is possible, no more conflict, at least for the majority and the minority if it accepts the vote. If not, move to the last step.

5. Democratic Leadership

Someone with (given, legitimate?) authority or power will decide. It is important to understand that this step, like all the others, is also fundamentally democratic. In our society we distribute mandates and have representatives with hierarchical authority. Taking leadership is one important way of taking decisions with high individual responsibility.
**Working with the concept**

As an example for these ways we use “the pumpkin” which three people would like to have and which can be quickly cut into three pieces or can be creatively shared by listening to the needs of those wanting it. Other example that can be used for demonstrating the scheme are the sharing of one seat in a crowded public metro or different people having the opportunity to get the last place in a training course.

In each case participants might volunteer to “play the case” while the other participants are observers, giving advice to what the volunteers should do to solve the case. After this play you as a trainer can develop the five steps along this example and let participants find other cases of conflict in which they should apply the five ways.

In order to make it easier for participants to get away from positions in a conflict, from playing a win-or-lose game, and to get to basic needs (step 1 in democratic decision making), you might use the following illustration, the “culture pyramid”\(^9\). It shows that the source of conflicts often stems from the top of every individual being different. Going down deeper and deeper in the pyramid, we will discover that we share a lot of basic needs. If we get to the needs, many conflicts will disappear, and those that remain, will be dealt with on a much deeper and existential level.

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