



World Forum for Democracy

7-9 November 2016, Strasbourg, Council of Europe

CONCEPT PAPER

30 March 2016



“Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.” – Franklin D. Roosevelt

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WHY IS THE WORLD FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY SPECIAL?

The World Forum for Democracy is a platform for dialogue and innovation dedicated to democracy which promotes the Council of Europe principles across the world. A unique event of its kind, it deals with challenges facing democracy taking as a starting point innovative initiatives and practice, and fostering debate between different actors in order to find SOLUTIONS. The Forum highlights and encourages democratic innovation to strengthen the foundations of democratic societies. A democratic exercise in itself, the Forum aims at giving the people – *demos* – their rightful place in political decision-making. It thus contributes to the evolution of democracy towards more participatory and inclusive structures and institutions.

WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE 2016 WORLD FORUM?

The 2016 World Forum for Democracy will focus on the relationship between education and democracy. It will examine whether they can reinforce each other and together address the risks of new social divides. In particular, the forum will explore how education and democracy can nurture active citizens with critical and analytical skills, and how through fostering grassroots innovation and bottom-up democratic reform, it can help develop civic engagement and improve opportunities for all.

¹ Source: [VOLODDYMYR V. MARTSENIUK / Shutterstock.com](#)

WHY IS THIS THEME IMPORTANT?

Education is central to democratic societies. In principle, the higher their level of education, the more actively citizens participate in elections and other aspects of democratic life. Education for democratic citizenship aims “by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law”².

But is education fulfilling its democratic mission or is it failing to build the key qualities for democratic citizenship? What is role of different education actors – teachers, learners, families, civil society organisations, public authorities, and the media? Is it necessary to reform the organisation and functioning of educational institutions in order to better respond to the requirements of democracy? Can schools and other educational environments become spaces for democratic experimentation, including new forms of democracy in the digital age? Are there new, alternative forms of learning and practicing democracy in educational institutions and how to analyse them?



“One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.” - Malala Yousafzai

Democracies, in theory at least, contain a promise of equitable education opportunities.

But social divides persist, and are even growing worldwide. What can we do better? How can education not only preach but also practice democracy? And how can democracy adopt more inclusive and participatory methods which give a voice to all citizens and not only the educated elites?

Recent studies reveal an increasing divide between educational “haves” and “have-nots”. According to the 2015 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, the poorest children are five times more likely not to complete primary school than the richest. Unequal access to quality education and educational outcomes leads to inequality both in terms of life chances, and in terms of access to democratic processes. To make things worse, inequalities are being reproduced across generations: the success of parents determines to a large extent the chances of children to fulfill their potential, regardless of their capacities and talents. Although “the millennials are the brainiest, best-educated generation ever, their elders often stop them from reaching their full potential”³.

² Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education

³ “The Economist” 23 Jan 2016

While governments have a responsibility for making education a means to reducing inequalities, greater citizen participation in decision-making regarding education could also contribute to this goal. Democracy is not a spectator sport - it relies on educated citizens to make informed decisions.

At the same time, education systems could do more to foster the civic values and skills needed not only for the optimal functioning of democracy, but also for its evolution towards a more participatory and inclusive *modus operandi*. Education has an important role to play in bridging cultural divides in society – ethnic, religious, linguistic, etc. – and in contributing to building an open mind and identity in line with the diverse, interconnected world of today. Finally, it is important to consider how non-formal and informal education can break the link between social inequality and political inequality and help nurture active citizens and leaders from disadvantaged backgrounds to drive sustainable change.

The World Forum for Democracy 2016 will draw upon ideas from a wide range of participants as well as innovative grassroots and political initiatives worldwide to kick-start the debate on what education can do for democracy and what democracy can do for education.

WHO WILL PARTICIPATE?

The Forum will involve political decision-makers, inspirational speakers, innovators and social entrepreneurs, as well as leaders from the education sector, civil society, the media, academia, faith groups, youth movements, and business.

Members of the Council of Europe Schools of Political Studies – involving emerging leaders in the Council of Europe’s newer member States and countries from its ‘neighbourhood’, – will be actively involved in the Forum. The Conference of INGOs, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Council Europe’s Education Committee (the CDPPE) will all be actively involved, as well as other Council of Europe structures as necessary. The Council of Europe Youth Sector will play an important role in the Forum preparation.

The Forum official programme is expected to involve up to 2,000 participants. Many more will participate in satellite events organised across the world, as well as through social networks. The Forum fringe programme involves large numbers of citizens and organisations across Strasbourg and the region.

HOW WILL THE FORUM WORK?

The Forum will consist of plenary sessions for high-level addresses; keynote introductions and a joint debate/summing up, as well as a series of focused working sessions – labs – to address specific issues through the critical analysis of tested initiatives or new ideas.

An open call will be issued to identify successful initiatives and novel, untested ideas, corresponding to the Forum themes. The initiatives and ideas will be presented and critically assessed by multidisciplinary panels and participants in the labs. Cartoonists will illustrate the sessions live. The key conclusions and lessons learnt from the labs will be discussed in a summing up session in order to prepare the overall conclusions for the Forum.

A meeting, possibly in the format of a “hackathon”, of the participants of the World Forum for Democracy’s Incubator for Participatory Democracy, will take place in the framework of the Forum in order to grow new

ideas on how to adopt democratic grassroots innovation on a systemic level and to foster an active community of democratic innovators.

The Forum will also provide an open space to enable spontaneous discussions, fresh ideas and new alliances to emerge. Creative sessions will be organised to produce concepts or prototypes on specific issues. The final plenary of the Forum will include an ‘open microphone’ session for participants to comment on conclusions or share insights or messages they intend to take home.

In order to reach out to a wider range of contributors and enrich the debate, the Forum welcomes the organisation of “satellite events” by universities renowned in the sphere of political studies and international relations, non-governmental organisations, municipalities and other institutions.

WHAT LANGUAGES WILL BE SPOKEN?

Interpretation between English and French will be provided in all sessions, with the possibility for interpretation in other languages, depending on the need (indispensable for key speakers and large groups of participants who do not speak one of the two official languages).

HOW WILL WE REACH OUT TO THE PUBLIC?

Apart from being an opportunity for meaningful exchanges and networking, the Forum will raise awareness of new ideas to promote and strengthen democracies and thereby help bridge social divides and improve opportunities for all. These ideas will be broadly disseminated in order to inspire states, local authorities and organisations across the world and pave the way for future work by the Council of Europe and other organisations in this field.

In order to maximise participation and outreach, the Forum plenary sessions will be transmitted live (and subsequently via recordings) on the Internet. A live Twitter thread will be displayed and an active Facebook page will be managed. Depending on available resources, smaller sessions will also be recorded for Internet transmission. A number of journalists and student journalists will be invited to report on the Forum. The possibility of partnerships with key media worldwide will be considered.

WHO IS BEHIND THE WORLD FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY?

Organised jointly by the Council of Europe, the French government, the Alsace-Champagne-Ardenne-Lorraine Region and the City of Strasbourg, as well as the European Parliament, the World Forum for Democracy involves Council of Europe member States, other international organisations, foundations, think tanks, universities and civil society organisations.