

INSPIRATION FOR A GOOD PUBLIC MEETING

Introduction

Many democratic debates have become hostile competitions with a winner and a loser. The aim seems rarely to be a true understanding of each other's views on which to produce concrete solutions. This we see in the debate on refugees, where the tone of the debate and the populist tendencies challenge the sense of community and cooperation, and creates a polarization among the citizens. It has almost become a question of being for or against refugees. This polarization has a great influence on how refugee centres and the reception of refugees are being debated in e.g. the municipalities in the country.

The Danish Folk High Schools traditionally contribute to the nuanced and informed democratic conversation between people of different backgrounds, attitudes, and origin. Therefore, we can make a collective attempt at being an alternative to populism and simultaneously promote the democratic conversation – all over the country.

Democracy is not merely listening and talking. It's about reflecting on others' and your own opinions and create new initiatives for the common good.

Theme

When you define, angle, and formulate the theme, think about the following:

Locally: Make sure to go in-depth with the local context. Perhaps there is a refugee centre close by? Maybe your municipality has already received refugees? Which local views and actions exist? What does the future seem to be? What is the responsibility of the local businesses, unions, and citizens?

Angle: Make sure you have an angle. Keep the theme concrete and relevant. If it gets to 'big' it quickly becomes diffuse and confusing.

Relevance: The theme must be presented so that it is relevant for the citizens and stakeholders. The theme must be presented so that 'most people' can have an opinion, something relevant for their local society.

Purpose: Consider the purpose of your public meeting. Is it meant to present a challenge you can have different attitudes to, and which must be discussed in order to reach a solution? Or is it meant to contribute to an increased understanding and dialogue between citizen groups? Or something else?

Stakeholders/participants

Identify the stakeholders, politicians, and citizen groups you want to participate.

Different views: Who might have an opinion on refugees in the local society?

Stakeholders: Which approaches to the subject can be found among the different parts of unions, authorities, and businesses and which interests might they have in relation to it?

Knowledge: Who knows something about the subject? Make sure that the public meeting is executed on a foundation of knowledge.

Representation: Who is affected by the subject? Make sure all involved parties are represented.

New voices: Consider if you might get someone talking who is not usually heard! Consider if you can make someone talk to each other who usually do not talk to each other.

Make sure all participants know exactly:

- Where, when, and how are you going to have the meeting?
- Who are the host and interviewers?
- Which debate concept have you chosen?
- Which subjects are you planning to discuss?
- Who else are invited as participants?

Principles and frameworks

Discuss which frameworks and principles you wish for your public meeting, and consider how you establish optimal preconditions for a good democratic dialogue.

The room: Can you aid in designing a more conversation friendly room by the way you arrange tables and chairs. Could you place people at group tables or circles etc.?

Your role as hosts: How can you make sure all participants feel well received and welcome?

Ice-breaker: Can you plan one or more ice-breakers to loosen up the mood and make the dialogue flow. E.g. by singing together or doing an active exercise. E.g. inspired by All that we share <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD8tjhVO1Tc>

Form: Do you want a classic debate with a panel, but with more participation from the participants? Do you want a round-table conversation? Do you want a walk-and-talk, or...? How does your chosen form contribute to the public meeting?

Content: How do you make sure that the debate stays on course? Prepare the introduction. What should be said? Consider who you grant speaking time, when and how? How do you make sure that the meeting is conducted in a well-informed manner?

Programme: Make a realistic programme for the meeting. How much time for introduction? Speeches? Debate? Questions? Break?

Rules: Establish a set of rules and make sure to communicate these clearly to the participants, as you make them aware of the purpose of the meeting

Communication

Social media: Announce the event ahead of the meeting on the Folk High School's social media platforms. E.g. make an event on facebook.

Vox pop film: Make a small film where you ask five participants of the public meeting the same question. Share the movie on the Folk High School SOME-channels.

It's a good idea to encourage people to share on social media.

Hashtags: Use #højskole and #flygtninge. Both hashtags are widely shared. If you have questions about the SOME effort, ask the school's SOME responsible.

Local press: Write a press release for the local press. Højskolernes Hus will try to push the story to national media.

Advertising: Ask your school how it usually advertises local events. Or simply contact the local newspaper(s) and advertise there.

Practical Planning

Remember that there are lots of practicalities connected with executing an open event.

- Date
- Location
- Theme
- Moderator
- Helpers
- Technology
- Catering

Divide the tasks between the responsables in your project group so there is a clear allocation of responsibilities and tasks:

- Microphones
- Projector
- Audio files
- Space set up, including chair arrangement, coffee / tea, cake, etc.
- Should there be small programs on the chairs or posters?
- Signs showing the participants the right place.
- Who receives panellists and makes sure they get what they need?
- Who takes care of journalists from local press?

Inspiration: Frirummet – a new form of debate

Frirummet is an initiative created by the free schools sponsored by Trygfonden. Frirummet's purpose is to re-establish the democratic debate for the common good of our society. Frirummet is both a vision of cultural change, anchored in the local schools, and a new form of debate. As such, Frirummet will challenge the traditional forms of debate and strengthen the ability to conduct democratic debates in the entire country.

What is a 'frirumsdebat'?

A Frirumsdebat is a special debate format developed by the three types of free schools. When you conduct a frirumsdebat, the event consists of three rounds and everything is moderated by a trained debate pilot, who is a teacher, head master, or member of the school board of one of the free schools. In this way, the schools themselves take responsibility of their local society, and the wish to improve our democratic culture of dialogue.

Round 1: fronts

A Frirumsdebat always takes its point of departure in a conflict and as such does not presume consensus. Here the conflict is taken seriously and the debaters are expected to be able to draw a clear picture of what they disagree on. This can be a decision, it might be the conditions for a political choice, or it can be ideological. The crucial thing is that a Frirumsdebat doesn't end here, but uses the conflict for reflection.

Round 2: reflections

Here the debaters have the opportunity to tell a personal story so the background for their opinion is more easily perceived. It is also necessary for the debaters to break habitual talking points so the free exchange of opinions isn't obstructed by prepared statements. In this round the debaters can also be put in their opponents' place, so that (s)he has to account for the oppositions arguments.

Round 3: initiatives

In the final round, the audience is invited to join in so it becomes clear what can be done forthcoming. It isn't given that the debaters find a common solution, but often the reflections have led to new options, just as the audience are asked to take responsibility for taking further action. Lastly, the trained debate pilot asks the audience how they became wiser in order to emphasize that the democratic debate can only be improved if everyone learns from, and listen to, each other. How the three rounds turn out varies according to the content. The important thing is that the debate is according to these principles:

A Frirumsdebat:

- Is moderated by a trained debate pilot from the free schools.
- Has the above mentioned three rounds and is based on the principles behind them.
- Is rooted in the work of schools.
- Has a conflict as a starting point.
- Provides freedom to argue, listen and be listened to.
- Involves the attending audience.
- Based on the recognition of other opinions, views, and values than those you stand for yourself.
- Works on a foundation where there is freedom to doubt, become wiser, and change opinion.

www.frirummet.org