

FROM AUDIENCE TO PARTICIPANTS:

HOW TO ENGAGE THE NEXT GENERATION IN OUR DEMOCRACY



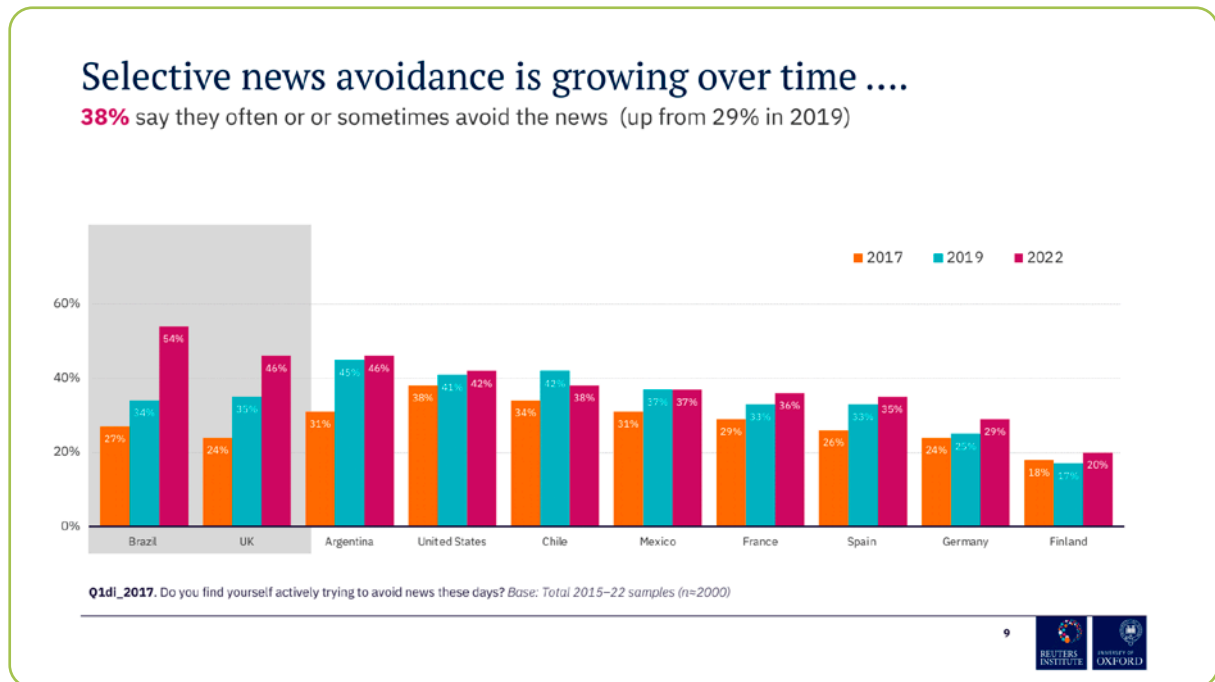
EVALUATION REPORT
WILLIAM DEMANT FOUNDATION
JESPER HIMMELSTRUP

**“Democracy can never
be secured - because it
is not a system just to be
implemented, but a way
of life to be pursued”**

(Hal Koch 1904-1963)

1. Generation News Avoidance

In today's fast-paced world, where information flows abundantly and swiftly, the role of news media in shaping public opinion and facilitating democratic processes cannot be undermined. However, an increasing number of young people are showing a tendency towards news avoidance (or news fatigue), disconnecting themselves from traditional sources of information, shows the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022.



Implications for Democracy

News avoidance refers to the deliberate act of young individuals avoiding news content across various media platforms. This phenomenon has gained momentum in recent years, primarily attributed to a range of factors such as information overload, disinterest, distrust, and the rise of alternative sources of information, including social media.

News avoidance among the youth poses several challenges for democracy. Firstly, it leads to a lack of informed citizenry, as young people may be uninformed about crucial societal issues, political developments, and policy debates. This information deficit undermines their ability to participate meaningfully in democratic processes, including voting and holding elected officials accountable.

Moreover, news avoidance can contribute to the polarization of society. When individuals rely solely on selective sources of information, they are more likely to reinforce their existing beliefs and perspectives, leading to the creation of echo chambers. This hampers the healthy exchange of ideas and stifles constructive dialogue necessary for a vibrant democracy.

At the same time, during the recent decades, young people have derived from participating in the public debate. Not because they do not want to, simply they have already had too many bad experiences based on it - which leads to decline in democracy if generations of people from the beginning have withdrawn themselves from certain parts of society.

Thus, the aim of this project - generously supported by William Demant Foundation - has been to dive into the deeper matters and find methods to restore the trust, so that everyone - and least of not all: The next generation - wants to take part in the public conversation and, above all, our democracy again.

The heritage from Hal Koch

As a full-time teacher of Journalism & media at Krogerup Folk High School I have for a decade dealt with hundreds of students of which some of them are dreaming of becoming journalists or working in the media business. Some of my students have already tried taking part in the public debate - either as spokespersons from different organizations or student councils - or by having published readers' letters etc. in different magazines or on Facebook or other some-channels. What I am most shocked to hear about, is that many of them (especially the young women) have had a lot of bad experiences dealing with it - as harassments, threats, and everything else than a good dialogue have often been the consequences.



(Students At Krogerup Folk High School, Spring 2022. Photo: Lotte Fløe Christensen)

At Krogerup, the 'Old Democracy-Folk High School', formed by theologian and professor Hal Koch, I have discussed and challenged democracy with my students every day. The essence of democracy is, according to Hal Koch, conversation and dialogue, where different standpoints are tested, and a common solution entered. Democracy is in his view an informal process, where standpoints are presented, and a reasonable solution for all parties is entered – a process that will develop the human character of the participators.

According to Hal Koch, democracy is thus equivalent of compromises bringing people together crosswise of different points of views. Which today is the total opposite of what a lot of young participants in the public debate are experiencing.

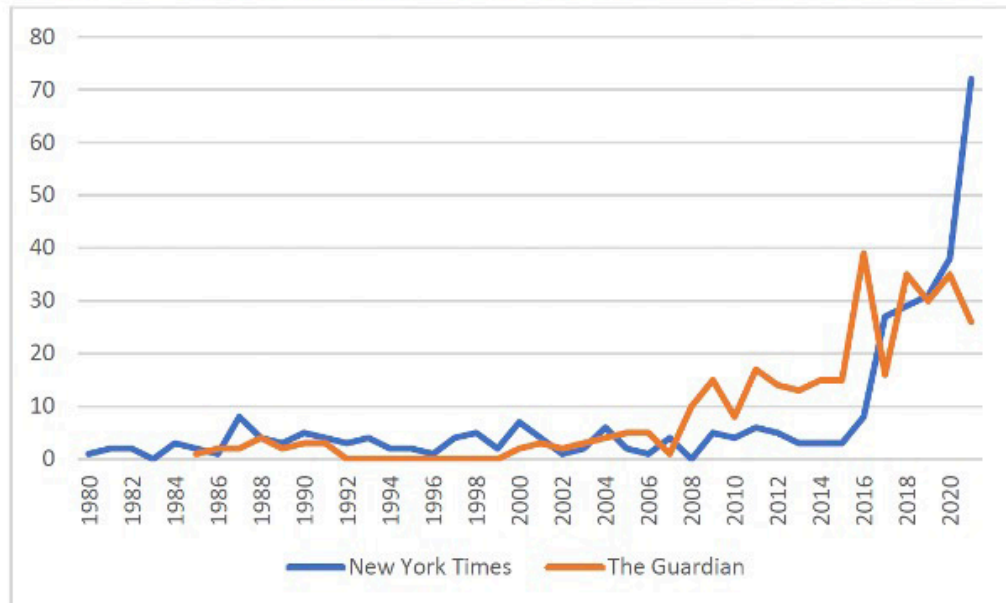
Therefore, the aim of this project has been to invent models (or platforms) and create rooms for dialogue so that everyone – and most of all: the next generation – will feel both safe and getting the courage as a listener and participant in taking part in the public conversation again.

2. Courses

Having been a fellow at The Constructive Institute for 10 months I've had the privilege to dive into a broad scope of perspectives at The University of Aarhus. Thus, in the fall I followed the course "The crisis of democracy in a comparative perspective" by Professor Svend-Erik Skaaning at The Department of Political Science and "Narrative and visual rhetoric" by Professor Stefan Iversen at the Institute of Aesthetics and Communication.

The crisis of democracy in a comparative perspective

In the first we defined democracy, charts its rise, revival, and resurgence across history and nations, and discusses when democracy has made a difference - and when and why it has failed. To many people democracy seems to be out of touch with the times. It is unable to provide answers to humanity's most important questions - from climate change to economic inequality, welfare, peace, and tolerance. Democratic governance also appears to only emerge and survive in countries with a European cultural heritage, and even here, democracies are more fragile than we imagine. So, the question is: Is our least imperfect form of governance (as Churchill would have put it) really in such poor condition? At the course we critically examined the most significant claims about the essence, development, and state of democracy, showing how these widespread notions either entirely or partially lack a solid foundation. And by debunking these long-standing myths about democracy, I believe we gained a more accurate picture and became wiser about the nature, history, and ability of democracy to address political challenges, especially when it comes under attack.

Figure 1: Number of news articles mentioning crisis and democracy


Source: LexisNexis. Search terms "democracy" & "crisis"

Narrative and visual rhetoric

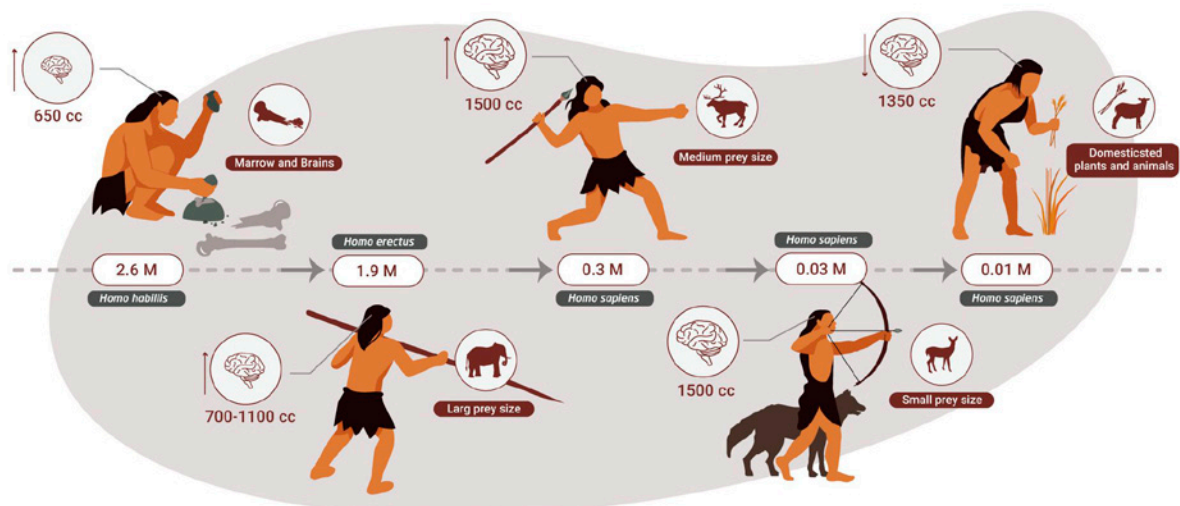
In the latter I had the interesting experience to dive into the world of rhetoric, narratives, speeches, master plots, stories, pictures and films. Why is it for instance that some speeches become immortal while others ARE quickly forgotten? From a communicative point of view, it was extremely interesting to learn a new vocabulary on communication, reading speeches from people like PM Mette Frederiksen, former PM Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Apple-founder Steve Jobs, TV-host Sofie Linde and many other. And least of not all we saw and analyzed a great number of pictures and photos – many of them having changed history. Among them the first Monkey Selfie taken by a so-called Black Ape which launched a series of copyright disputes among photographers and editors 10 years ago.



(Apparently the first monkey-selfie in the world. Photo: Black Ape)

Menneskedyret – The Human Animal

During this spring I've had the privilege to follow the fascinating course "Menneskedyret" by Professor Henrik Høeg-Olesen at the Institute of Psychology which looks at the Human Animal from an Evolutionary and Behavioral Psychology-perspective. During the course we had lectures on subjects like Existence, Aesthetics, Stimulation, Hierarchy, Sex, and Morality in the Human Animal. From a journalistic point of view, it is interesting to see how the human brain is programmed to react on things that triggers our anxiety – which billion years ago was the thing that made us survive. Today researchers find that the brain is still coded towards a negativity-bias (why headlines with fear, anger, drama etc. seems to find a much easier way into our minds than the positive things).



3. PLAY PING PONG WITH YOUR POLITICIAN

Only about six weeks after the start of the fellowship, PM Mette Frederiksen on October 5th, 2022, called for election for the Danish parliament to be held on Tuesday November 1st. At this moment I knew that this was a chance to try out some of the ideas concerning young people, politics, the public conversation and democracy. From my many years of experience at the folk high school I've learned one clear lesson: If you want a group of people to interact with each other, then give them a Table Tennis Table, a lot of Table Tennis Paddles and make them play 'Around the Table'. Because Table Tennis in many ways seems to be some sort of a democratic game where almost everybody can join without greater experience – and there seems to be this beautiful feeling of 'keeping the ball in game' which means that even though you play against all your opponents, they also become your co-fellow players.

I therefore reached out to FOF (Folkeligt Oplysnings Forbund) Aarhus for an invitation to a co-operation, and I contacted TuborgFondet that had just launched a Funding Pool for the elections. And as everyone agreed on the idea, in 36 hours we launched a schedule for the Ping Pong to take place. An important idea was to reach as many 'levels' of education as possible, and as a practical thing I aimed on getting in touch with institutions around Aarhus as we only had three weeks on planning, making PR, settings up the arrangements, getting in touch with students etc.

Finally I chose to work with; Idrætshøjskolen i Aarhus, Aarhus Katedralskole, FGU Aarhus Vest i Gellerup, Studenterhuset, Aarhus Universitet and Danmarks Medie- og Journalisthøjskole (DMJX). Together with FOF Aarhus I made a logo, and we started producing the posters, materials for adverts on social media etc.





At the same time, I reached out to a lot of politicians who were running for parliament in Eastern Jutland. Luckily many of them thought not only this was an excellent idea, they also themselves wanted to meet new students in other situations like in the normal panel discussions. Of course it was important that more than one side of the political spectrum was present – in the end the politicians turned out to be:

Jens Joel, Socialdemokraterne, Camilla Fabricius, Socialdemokraterne, Anna Thusgård, Socialdemokraterne, Anders Vistisen, Dansk Folkeparti, Heidi Bank, Venstre, Erik Veje Rasmussen, Venstre, Katrine Robsøe, Radikale, Andreas Steenberg, Radikale, Linda Englyst, DanmarksDemokraterne, Helle Vium, Alternativet, Nicoline Erbs Hillers-Bendtsen, Alternativet, Inger-Marie Tryde, Nye Borgerlige, Anne Hegelund, Enhedslisten, Sofie Lippert, SF, Anna Brændemose, SF, Isabella Arendt, Konservative, Henrik Hjortshøj, Kristendemokraterne, Tobias Grotkjær Elmstrøm, Moderaterne, Jens Meilvang, Liberal Alliance.

The Game Plan

With a small amount of money from TuborgFondet I ordered some Table Tennis Tables – and now we were ready for settings things up. I made the game-plan: That every third time, the ball was out of game, it was possible for the students to ask the politicians a question. But to avoid only 'regular' political questions I (with help from my classmates at the university) prefabricated 100 questions that could also have a more personal angle. The whole idea was to open the conversation, so the students would have a feeling that they were not only meeting a politician, but also a human being.



(Examples of questions for the politicians. Photo: Martin Dam Kristensen)

On Thursday October 13th 12.30-14.00 we launched the first game at Idrætshøjskolen Aarhus with 120 students – and it went above all expectations. The politicians were great, the students were excellent, and all in all we found ourselves in the middle of a lot of constructive and meaningful conversations.



(Ping pong at Idrætshøjskolen Aarhus. Photo: Martin Dam Kristensen)



(Discussions between participants and politicians. Photo: Martin Dam Kristensen)

Summarizing I asked the politicians what they gained from it, and they were really satisfied with the arrangement. They answered:

"We should do some more of this – not only during the elections"

"Great way of engaging the young audience"

"Sometimes our panel discussions often end up with the same turn out. During this we were questioned from all different types of angles which forced everyone out of their comfort zone".



(The six politicians had a great experience during the ping pong. Photo: Martin Dam Kristensen)

But even more important I got some interesting quotes from the younger audience:

"I think things like these can create more interest from a young audience who don't often follow the politics"

"It created a more intimate atmosphere, so it was easier to getting to know the politicians better"

"Often I like to discuss and hear peoples' arguments, and I was afraid we were only going to play Table Tennis. But I think we had a lot of good and interesting conversations with the politicians"



(Audience at the ping pong. Photo: Eline Jul Jørgensen)



(Participants asking questions for the politicians. Photo: Eline Jul Jørgensen)

FGU Aarhus Vest

I will not go into details with all the arrangements - instead I will emphasize on our arrangement that took place at Den Forberedende Grunduddannelse, FGU Aarhus Vest in Gellerup. The Preparatory Basic Education (FGU) is aimed at individuals under the age of 25, who are not yet ready to start or complete another youth education. This

may be due to academic, personal, or social reasons. Before the arrangement I had a talk with the director, Jens Ole Jørgensen, who warned me that the students often would avoid political meetings with the reason "politics, society and democracy have nothing to do with me".

I - and Hal Koch - could not have disagreed more.

So, on Wednesday October 26th, 2022, I drove the car with my co-fellow Steffen Slot and lots of equipment but little expectations to Gellerup. It turned out to be a blast. Here are some of the highlights:

Zara Axelsen, who herself has converted to Islam, stood in her white knitted dress and black head scarf, and discussed head scarves with Inger-Marie Tryde (Nye Borgerlige) for about 10 minutes before the ping-pong began.



(Zara Axelsen discussing head scarf with Inger-Marie Tryde. Nye Borgerlige. Foto: Steffen Slot)

And seeing around 80 students who were really not into doing anything that morning, and then - when we started the play - see them getting fired up really questioning the politicians in many ways, was really worth the journey.

The question "Will you provide free psychological help for young people?" sparked a larger debate, and the politicians discussed, among other things, more prevention and psychological assistance directly at schools, which resulted in a flurry of raised hands - raising several questions:

"What about families where the parents themselves are so vulnerable that they cannot see that their children need help?" asked Emma, who also shared her own experience of being admitted to a psychiatric ward and being prescribed medication that caused her to hallucinate.

"We can't prevent when we're in this age group," said Johanne Petersen. "Teachers are not good at identifying young people who are struggling," Josephine Krushave added.



(Emma and classmates at FGU Aarhus Vest. Photo: Steffen Slot)

Two of the teachers, Hanne Christensen, and Marianne Tang Christensen, were very proud of their students. They had spent several hours preparing and discussing what constitutes an argument versus a mere statement. The students had prepared questions and discussed how to ask follow-up questions.

Hanne mentioned that Abdallah hadn't been particularly enthusiastic and had been lying across the table during their preparation session. However, once the ping pong with the politicians started, he actively participated and asked follow-up questions. It was Abdallah who, during one of the headscarf debates, said:

"Why do you care so much about headscarves? We can't afford anything; everything is expensive - we're all pretty broke. Headscarves don't matter."

This remark was met with applause.



(“Why do you care so much about head scarves?” Photo: Martin Dam Kristensen)

It was also during the head scarf debate that a young man in a green sweater asked Inger-Marie Tryde (Nye Borgerlige) what politicians would do to ensure job opportunities if someone were fired for wearing a head scarf at work.

“What will they do if they don’t get paid?” Inger-Marie Tryde asked, but the young man persisted:

“That’s not their problem; it’s your problem if you eliminate a large portion of the workforce. Who will then handle the tasks?”



(The head scarf debate at FGU Aarhus Vest. Photo: Martin Dam Kristensen)

Asked how they would explain that as young people, how come they asked so many good questions and what they thought of the ping pong format instead of a traditional debate, they replied:

"We have it tougher than other young people. That's why," Abdallah said.

"We're angry, and we have many questions that we're eager to ask. It has been fun to meet the politicians this way," said 22-year-old Emma Sandbergh.

"I struggled with my voice, when I had to ask my question, but I dared to do it because it was fun, and we were playing ping pong," Rehanne Kareem said.



(Ping pong with politician Andreas Steenberg (Rad.) at FGU Aarhus Vest. Photo: Martin Dam Kristensen)

"We have a lot on our minds, and as a group, we face many challenges. We are a diverse bunch, and we are more affected than young people in, for example, high schools," Johanne Petersen said.

"I found it difficult to get all the politicians to answer the questions while also playing table tennis. But for others, it was fun to play and start the conversation. Personally, I would have gotten more out of it if we had spent the entire time asking questions to the politicians," Zara Axelsen said.



(The conversations went on – long after the game had ended. Photo: Martin Dam Kristensen)

Nevertheless when the game was over after 90 minutes of heated discussion, we realized that the conversations kept going on. When we left the building, Abdallah reached out to me:

"I never thought I would be interested in politics. Today I've made a decision: I will go and vote for this election," he said.

The day after I got an email from director Jens Ole Jørgensen:

"Thank you for a fantastic election meeting today! It was a superb concept, and it really defused the "us vs. them" experience! The atmosphere was filled with positive energy afterward, and there were smiles all around. Well done!"



(Play ping pong with your politicians at FGU Aarhus Vest. Photo: Martin Dam Kristensen)



YOUNG PEOPLE

AUDIO



AN AWESOME PODCAST

"SKAM also had a tiny budget"
... in other words: YOU can do it!



DEMOCRATIC CONVERSATION

ORLA'S WISH:



DATA:

- EPIMION?
- FOCUS GROUPS?

(and 'OR medie-forskning'...)

POSSIBLE PARTNERS/AUDIENCE

'EFTERSKOLE'

FOLK HIGH SCHOOLS

?

'F6U'

THE ONES REMOVED FROM THE DEBATE

JESPER'S PROJECT

STATUS: NOVEMBER 2022

4. Democratic bootcamps and Peoples Dialogue Festival in Nairobi, Kenya

During the month of the winter I had classes from different Folk High Schools coming to our lounge to hear about constructive journalism. I also had my class from psychology on a visit. Furthermore, I went to Rønne Folk High School one day to give a speech about our work.



(A visit from the Psychology-class at the Constructive Institute. Photo: Eline Jul Jørgensen)

In the beginning of march I was invited to Kenya as a part of The Constructive Institute. First, to facilitate three democratic workshops, secondly to participate in the three-day 'Peoples Dialogues Festival' in Nairobi. The background for establishing the workshops was this:

"A constructive democratic conversation lies the heart of liberal democracies. With the 2022 Kenyan elections finalized and a new president inaugurated there is an opportunity for electoral and political stakeholders and the Kenyan media to address the barriers for political participation for women and young people in the country. Politicians and journalists alike will have a choice as to how they will contribute to this democratic conversation. Will they work to bridge the trust gap that has been deepening in the last decades? Could new approaches lead to less polarization, less populism, and a strengthening of the political center?"

Bootcamp One - Female Politicians:
Monday March 6th 2023 at the The Tribe Hotel, Gigiri Nairobi

The first bootcamps focused on female politicians. All 27 of the newly elected female politicians were invited to participate under a 'Chatham House'-rules setting. Participants were introduced to concepts of constructive journalism and how they could contribute to and strengthen democratic engagement. Reporting plans were developed as to how produce better coverage of women leaders and aspirants.



(Participants at the Democratic Bootcamp with Project Leader Cynara Wetch (middle) from Constructive Institute)

Hanna Tetteh, UN Under-Secretary-General & Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa, a Ghanaian former MP and former Minister for Foreign Affairs was the keynote speaker for the Democratic Bootcamp. In her inspirational speech, she said:

“There is a need to move away from the toxic partisanship narrative and focus on issue-based media coverage for the work female politicians are doing for their constituents.”

She further argued that on the gender agenda, female politicians cannot afford to be partisan, but must build bridges even with fierce opponents.

Bootcamp Two - The Youth:

Tuesday March 7th 2023 at the The Tribe Hotel, Gigiri Nairobi

A group of 25 young politicians and graduate journalists at the start of their careers were invited to explore possibilities for change. The participants heard from experienced leaders in the politics and news sectors about the current relationship between political reporting and political engagement. All participants were exposed to principles of constructive journalism and constructive politics. At the conclusion of the event a set of principles were drawn up by the participants for a constructive circle of media and politics. The idea was, that this could lead to an operation for a network of young politicians and journalists when contributing to political coverage and media engagement.

In the discussions that included a presentation from Naima Mingai, a Kenyan media practitioner, and former Danish MP, Kirsten Brosbøl, it emerged that ethical standards are being shot to pieces and the media business is collapsing. Financial survival had become the main story. Reporters are going for the low-hanging fruits, things are emotional and sensational. As result public interest is really suffering. News has been reduced to conflict and sensation seeking. The media is often weaponized against women, some of them claimed.



(Former Danish MP and Minister for The Environment, Kirsten Brosbøl, speaks at the bootcamp. Photo: Frenny Jowi)

"Many young people would not want to think of democracy as something to thrive for, because there are no solutions being offered. We really must think about delivering solutions. Journalism needs to present and lift the individuals and organizations that are offering the solutions," said Kirsten Brosbøl, Former Danish MP and Minister for Environment.

Bootcamp three - The Next Generation

Thursday March 9th, 2023, at the National Museums of Kenya
The final bootcamp WAS focused on "The Next Generation". 23 Journalism students and young political aspirants were addressing what is needed for a new type of politics and a new type of journalism as they begin their careers. The main idea was that next generation needs to learn



(Journalist Jesper Himmelstrup talks about the experiences from Denmark and the need of democratic self-confidence at the bootcamp. Photo: Frenny Jowi)

how news reporting can go beyond clickbait and the battle for attention by turning up the volume ending up with the question: How can new journalists and politicians be lighthouses for facilitating public conversations on improving problems in society?



(Danish MP, Sigurd Agersnap, speaks at the democratic bootcamp. Photo: Jesper Himmelstrup)

Addressing the politicians present, Danish MP Sigurd Agersnap, encouraged the young legislators to work on their new ideas without fear.

“Young people with new ideas find it hard to break into the media and society. Young leaders are also the present, not just the future. Experience is important but so is looking at things with fresh eyes and challenging the status quo,” he added.

As the first keynote speaker after the MP, I painted the picture of a media that is at war with elected leaders and those in public office. Thus, I explained that, for centuries the model of journalism has promoted an adversarial relationship between the Fourth Estate and the politicians. The result of this has been a press that thrives on scandals and fights.

To get democracy to function at its best, constructive journalism is indispensable. BBC journalist and Stanford Fellow, Dickens Olewe, described journalism as the currency in which democracy trades.



(Young journalists and politicians listening to BBC-journalist Dickens Olewe. Photo: Frenny Jowi)

“News media is not a mere spectator in politics, it is arguably one of the most powerful actors,” Dickens said.

In a collaborative effort, Dickens Olewe and I got the journalists and politicians to network in a ‘speed dating’ session. The idea was that with the compatible matching of reporters and politicians, constructive journalism could

grow roots as more positive stories that highlight democratic gains find their way to the media.

Peoples Dialogue Festival

Friday March 10th, 2023, at the National Museums of Kenya

The week in Kenya ended up with the three-day Peoples Dialogue Festival in the heart of Nairobi – based on experiences of the Danish Public Meeting (Folkemødet). Here we had lined up a panel consisting of one young politician and one young journalist - trying to reveal what we had been talking about and discussing in the previous bootcamps.

Dickens Olewe and I hosted and facilitated the discussion – and we were thrilled about the enthusiasm and many great questions from the audience. So, we ended up talking about everything from handling the big problem of mental diseases in Kenya, to “Brown Envelope Journalism”, the gap between the cities and the rural areas – and least of not: the mistrust aimed at the media and the politicians.

A short summary was written by journalist Frenny Jowi on the day:

The Constructive Institute was part of a larger consortium of organizations that put together the 2023 People’s Dialogue Forum in Nairobi, Kenya. To engage young people further, the festival had a public audience that listened to several panelists on different topics.

We composed a panel made up of the following: a young female leader-Hon Mercy Kilel, a young Kenyan journalist, Tom Jalio, and a London-based BBC journalist, and Stanford Fellow, Dickens Olewe. The panel was moderated by Danish journalist and Constructive Institute Fellow Jesper Himmelstrup.

Panelists brought forward the issue of the role of the media in providing solutions for democratic governance. The discussion highlighted some of the biggest challenges journalists face such as low pay and poor working conditions. As a result, many reporters are enticed to take bribes from news sources in a trend that is now widely taking root and is known as brown envelope journalism. Politicians were asked to consider putting in legislation that protects the freedom of the press and the rights of journalists including giving them fair wages. Members of the public expressed their diminishing trust in the media and felt sated with the coverage of political personalities and not the issues that affect voters. Journalists were encouraged to take back their space and ability to influence the masses in a positive way that promotes the rule of law and democracy.

Tom Jalio, journalist at The Star Newspaper

“Many journalists are poorly paid and work in poor conditions. We urge legislators to put in place policies that protect the rights of journalists, ” he said.



(Panel Discussion at the Peoples Dialogue Festival in Nairobi, Kenya, March 2023. Photo: Frenny Jowi)

5. The Constructive Chronicle Competition

In late March – in collaboration with one of the oldest magazines in Denmark, Højskolebladet, I launched a Chronicle Competition based on constructive ideas and supported by the Constructive Institute. Our hope was that students and young people in general were interested in providing their suggestions for solutions to some of the major challenges we face in society. The competition aimed of course to inspire young students in particular to engage in the public discourse. Reward: The winner would receive 4,000 DKK and their essay would be published in the June issue of Højskolebladet.

The question, we wanted the young people to answer, was this:

In your opinion, what is society's most overlooked problem? And how would you like to see it resolved?

We formed a judging panel consisting of: Sofie Buch Hoyer, Editor-in-Chief, Højskolebladet
Lawand Hiwa Namu, independent communication advisor and former winner of the Danish National Debate Championship
Kenneth Lund, Debate Editor at the newspaper Politiken (and former fellow at CI)



Jesper Himmelstrup, journalist and fellow at Constructive Institute
Editor-in-Chief of Højskolebladet, Sofie Buch Hoyer quoted:

"Young people, including younger high school students, are increasingly choosing not to participate in public debate. Not because they don't want to, but because they have already had a number of negative experiences and lack democratic confidence. This does not benefit our society in any way, and Højskolebladet actively works to counteract it. The hope with the essay competition is therefore to create a space that will inspire high school students to write courageous and curious opinion pieces on behalf of their generation," said Sofie Buch Hoyer.

To our greatest surprise, at deadline on May 21st, we received more than 30 chronicles from young people all over the country. All of them focusing on a great variety of subjects like AI, Toxic Masculinity, Loneliness, Mental Health, and a lot more. The winner was on Digital Safety.

One of the competitors wrote:

"It's something I personally have considered several times but haven't really mustered the courage to do. However, the competition provides a good entry point into 'that world.'"

6. Essay & Reflections

The role of the journalist is changing these years. Rapidly. With the rise of social media, everyone has become their own publisher. And with the newly invented AI-technology it is obvious, that journalists all over the world must rethink their role and profession in the coming decades.

Fellow Franz Kruger from the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School has put it this way:

"It has become a commonplace that journalism is experiencing massive disruption. Traditional media are in decline as audiences move online, and there is much discussion about alternative revenue models. At the same time, trust in journalism is under significant pressure in a "post-fact" world. Social media have made it possible for almost anyone to have a voice. Communication has been democratized but it has also become easy for untruths to reach large audiences without the intervention of traditional filters of journalistic verification. The implications for journalism education have drawn some academic discussion, while journalism educators seek ways of adding more and more digital and social media skills into an already crowded curriculum. Less attention has been paid to the wider implications of a shrinking job market for journalists. The notion of journalism as a profession is fraying at the edges, with profound implications that journalism schools need to consider ... Journalism, in the sense of finding, sifting, and sharing important information, remains of crucial importance. But it is no longer under the sole control of professional journalists. News organizations remain important but must accept they are no longer information monopolies. Reliable information remains essential for societies to work, but it is produced by a range of people, not all of them in traditional newsrooms (February 2022)."

Having that in mind, I think we as journalists must look at ourselves with new glasses. Journalists are no longer just publishers of information – they are much more co-creators of content together with their audiences. That also goes for the youth.

Thus engaging the younger audience has become a pressing challenge for journalists in the digital age, and traditional journalism must adapt its strategies to capture the attention and trust of the younger generation. Therefore, it is crucial that journalists explore various approaches that journalists can employ to effectively engage the younger audience in the future, including leveraging digital platforms, embracing interactive and multimedia storytelling, and addressing the issues that matter to young people. So, to engage the younger audience, journalists must meet them where they are, and that means harnessing the power of digital platforms. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become significant sources of news and information for young people. Journalists can leverage these platforms by creating compelling and concise content tailored to the platform's format and utilizing engaging visuals, videos, and infographics to convey news stories effectively. By actively participating in discussions and interacting with their audience through comments, live Q&A sessions, and polls, journalists can establish a sense of community and foster trust with the younger generation.



(Photo: Martin Dam Kristensen)

Promoting Media Literacy and Civic Engagement

It also means that traditional text-based journalism is no longer sufficient to capture and retain the attention of the younger audience. By experimenting with innovative formats and embracing new technologies, journalists can create compelling narratives that connect with the younger audience on a deeper level.

Mostly important, engaging the younger audience goes beyond delivering news; it also involves promoting media literacy and fostering civic engagement. Journalists can play an active role in educating young people about critical thinking, fact-checking, and discerning reliable sources of information. By providing transparency in their reporting process and explaining journalistic principles, journalists can help young readers navigate the complexities of the media landscape. Furthermore, journalists can encourage civic participation by highlighting stories of young individuals making a difference in their communities, promoting volunteerism, and providing resources for further engagement.

Asked about: "How do we engage a younger audience as a journalist?", the ChatGPT suggest:

"To engage the younger audience, journalists must prioritize covering the issues that matter to them. Young people are often passionate about social justice, climate change, technology, and education, among other topics. Journalists should focus on providing in-depth coverage, analysis, and personal stories related to these issues. By amplifying the voices of young activists, showcasing solutions to societal challenges, and highlighting positive change, journalists can empower the younger generation

and foster a sense of agency. Collaborating with young journalists, influencers, and organizations can also provide valuable insights and perspectives, making news content more relatable and relevant to the target audience.

Engaging the younger audience in the future requires journalists to adapt to the changing media landscape and embrace new approaches to storytelling. By harnessing the power of digital platforms, embracing interactive and multimedia storytelling, addressing issues that matter to young people, and promoting media literacy and civic engagement, journalists can build trust, captivate the attention, and empower the younger generation. By actively involving young people in the news-making process and providing content that resonates with their interests and values, journalists can shape a future where the younger audience is actively informed, engaged, and inspired to make a positive impact on society.”

So, if we want to keep up with the upcoming generations of listeners, readers, and viewers, we must meet each other on common ground and find tools to involve our audiences much more than journalists have been used to. Influencers know that building up communities is the way to hold on to your audience, journalists should - to a larger distinct - think in that direction.

Either with ping pong, democratic bootcamps or competitions for writing. But the fan of possibilities is much larger. Therefore, Journalism Schools also need to think about the curriculum. And to focus also on the invention of ideas, entrepreneurship, new digital skills – and on the role of the future journalist also as a moderator, facilitator, and co-helper.

Cause journalism may emerge in all kinds of contexts, but unless it contributes value to public discussion, or give the audiences a better understanding of the world, it is simply noise.

Instead, as they say at The Constructive Institute:
“Perspective matters. Broaden yours.”

That also applies to journalists.



(Photo: Martin Dam Kristensen)

