



# LET ME **IN**.

# HEAR ME **OUT**.

A report on Nordic youth and democracy based on experiences from Ungdommens Folkemøde NORD 2023



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**UNGDOMS**BUREAUET

June 2023

### In collaboration with



### Supported by

A.P. MØLLER FONDEN

KNUD HØJGAARDS FOND







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# Introduction

On April 21-22, 2023, Ungdommens Folkemøde NORD took place for the very first time in Copenhagen, Denmark. Being the first of its kind, the democracy festival focused exclusively on Nordic youth, creating a space for political and cultural exchanges, democratic activities, creative expressions, and international networking.

Ungdommens Folkemøde NORD as a festival aimed to strengthen the democratic self-confidence of Nordic youth and to kickstart the social and cultural community of the Nordic region. Nordic youth are among the best in the world when it comes to knowledge about democratic systems and rights. We wanted to make use of this knowledge by letting Nordic youth come together and explore what the Nordic region is and more importantly what it can be.

By sharing dreams, experiences and ideas with decision makers, organizations, and activists across national borders, we wanted to make way for the perspectives and creativity of Nordic youth - hopefully creating the strongest democratic generation in the history of the Nordics.

In the end, the festival enjoyed 1.500+ participants during two sunny days in Copenhagen, and some of them have contributed with valuable insights used as data in this report. With "Let me in. Hear me out." we seek to explore and explain some of the thoughts and statements made by young Nordic participants at Ungdommens Folkemøde NORD 2023 with a focus on three main topics: Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Social Entrepreneurship.

So, without further ado, let's get going.

# Data Collection

The data used in this report is collected through a fragmented framework with six different approaches to our respondents: On-site interviews, online surveys, art installations, videos, interactive activities, and motivation statements. The range of approaches has been preferred in order to get a varied set of data where the respondents have had the possibility to engage with questions and themes in more than just one way. In our view it is important to apply a broad scope when it comes to types of engagement options; “young people” are not to be viewed as one homogenous unit that responds equally to everything, but individuals with different preferences when it comes to engaging and expressing themselves, which makes it all the more important to offer different options. Our Nordic partner organizations were a strategic part of the data collection inviting respondents to reflect on our three main topics combined with what they themselves wanted to know from young respondents. Finally, the methodological diversity serves the purpose of delivering different types of answers to different types of themes and questions.

A possible downside of our fragmented framework is that the data collected can (and must) be interpreted in numerous ways for it to be comparable and meaningful as part of a whole report, but the strengths of the diversity in answers outweighs the difficulties, we believe.

## Presentation of data contributors

In the following sections, we present our different approaches and collaborations that have contributed to the data collection.

### **Cluster & Margin: Interviews and survey (200+)**

In a collaboration with Cluster & Margin, we developed an interview guide alongside an online survey that was introduced to our respondents during the two festival days. The interview was made one-on-one with interviewer and respondent in order to get deeper and more detailed conversational answers, and the online survey was rolled out to increase the number of responses while also inviting well-thought, qualitative answers.

### **Buen & Engen: Painting activity (30+)**

Local art collective Buen & Engen played a part in the atmosphere of the festival offering a space for creativity and arts crafting where one could paint a picture as a statement in relation to one of our three main themes in this report (see part I, II, III). Their activity, therefore, served as data collection as the respondents expressed themselves in artistic ways through paintings and statements while adding explanation texts on the backside of their artworks.



### **FUTURE: Art installation (50+)**

Ungdomsbureauet's technology-meets-democracy project Future Generations Shaping Future Technology contributed with an arts installation that invited participants to reflect on statements in relation to democracy and technology.

### **Voksenåsen: Confession Tree (200+)**

Our Norwegian partner, Voksenåsen, contributed with a "Confession Tree"; an abstract activity that asked participants to anonymously write down an opinion that they wouldn't dare to say out loud to family or friends. This enabled a whole new realm of thoughts and statements from the respondents as they were given a space to highlight "forbidden" or taboo opinions.

### **Nuva Ry: Pearl Voting (100+)**

Our Finnish partner, Nuva Ry, created a voting system where respondents had to reflect over statements and cast a vote by placing pearls in buckets depending on what opinion they agreed with.

### **Sveriges Ungdomsråd: Post Office (40+)**

Our Swedish partner, Sveriges Ungdomsråd, made a post office in which the respondents could write letters to politicians with their thoughts on topics or statements that the politicians should know or act on.

### **KRK Inua: Video Interviews (10+)**

Our Greenlandic partner, KRK Inua, made video interviews where respondents could comment on topics in relation to Greenland, Nordic collaboration and/or Ungdommens Folkemøde NORD.

## **Analytic approach and declaration of bias**

With the data conducted as a patchwork with different sources and questions, the various findings call for interpretation and comparison along the way. The responses, we believe, are not to be viewed as isolated statements, but part of a whole that is to be connected in a greater context in order to make sense and tell a story or two. Our analysis, therefore, will be subject to comments and assessments from us based on our experience and knowledge from Ungdomsbureauet's work in the field of youth and democracy. So, in all transparency, we want to acknowledge and "warn" that our bias will shape the outcome of this report. For bad or for worse remains to be seen. But as far as it goes, we will strive to be as reasonable as possible throughout the analysis.



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FRIDAY

## THE COMPASS

16:00- No Hate Speech Movement

16:30 Three youth ambassadors from the Norwegian fraction of No Hate Speech Movement facilitate a workshop focusing on human rights and oppression of minorities.  
Language: English

17:00- Nordic Speed Dating -  
17:30 Faroese Edition

Puffins, colonialism, and the controversial role of  
Lupine... come test  
your  
date  
Language: English

18:00-  
18:30

STÅ OPP MOT  
HATPR...

FRIDAY

## SUSTAINABILITY & FUTURE

15:00- A Discussion on  
15:30 Sustainability and Future

Join Malmö FN-förening, as they together with a secret  
guest, deep dive into topics such as sustainable development,  
the sustainable development goals and Agenda 2030.  
Language: Swedish

16:00- Climate Change and  
Factory Farming

...sequences of factory farming on our climate?  
...ence as they invite an animal's rights activist  
...for a debate on factory farming and

The Power to  
Better Future!

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# PART I

## DEMOCRACY

# PART I: Democracy

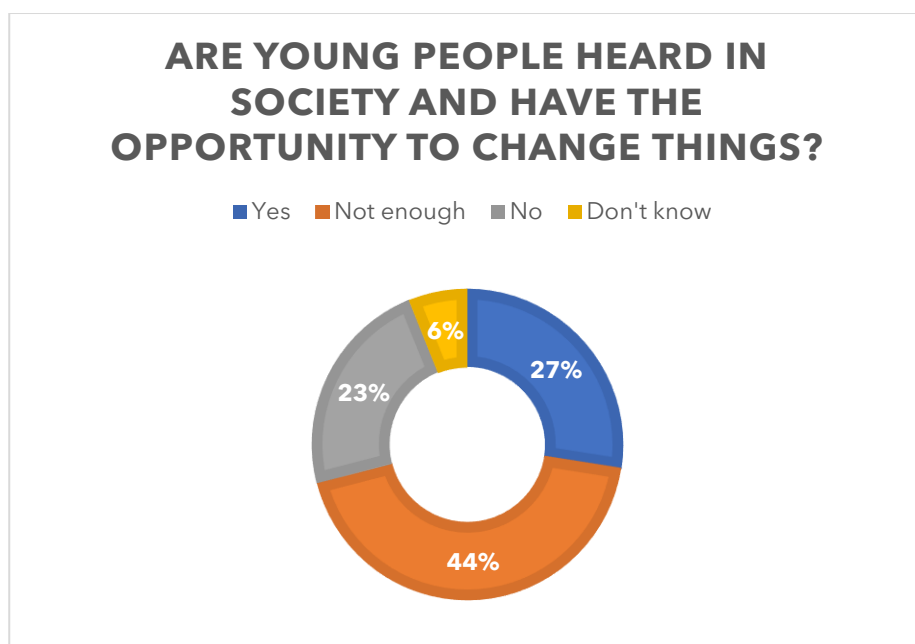
**“I think we are somewhat heard, but not as much on an institutional level as we should be” (Finnish person)**

This section will be focusing on *democracy*, or, more specifically, young Nordics’ view on trust and inclusion within democracy, with the main tendency being that our respondents question their own agency due to systematic limitations that seems to be completely or partly out of their control.

## Lack of attention to young voices

Nordic democracies are often highlighted as among the very best, and while that might be deserved, it doesn’t mean that there are no flaws at all. One of the major findings in our data collection is that only 1 in 4 respondents feel that young people are sufficiently heard in society and have the opportunity to change things. When asked, the respondents make it clear that while there might be some degree of *agency*, a feeling of actual power of influence, their voices are often ignored, overlooked, or neglected. As one respondent simply puts it: “It depends on the decision and the leaders who want to include youth”.

The actual *willingness* from those in power to include youth seems to be causing frustration throughout the responses with many respondents aiming critique at the lack of inclusion, an example of this being: “No, I feel like people like politicians say they want the input of people, but they don't actually listen to us when it matters” (Anonymous respondent, source: Cluster & Margin).



**Illustration 1.1:** Are young people heard? (Source: Cluster & Margin survey)



It is worth noting that although the respondents come from different backgrounds all over the Nordic countries and are aged from 16-30+, the majority highlight the same challenge when it comes to inclusion. Also, many of them, as we will highlight in Part II, are democratically active people that *does* try to make their voices heard, which suggests that it is difficult to even the most engaged.

Among the letters collected by Sveriges Ungdomsråd in their data activity, we find the same tendency. Some statements are brief like “Listen to the youth!!!”, and some are more elaborated:

I think that adults and politicians need to listen and show young people that they are interested of young's ideas and to make a better city, state, world. They often say that they want or they do listen but then they doesn't give feedback and do something. They just throw everything away. (Source: Sveriges Ungdomsråd)

As such, it paints a picture of a general issue across the Nordic countries, the caveat being the small sample size of the data, and it suggests that even traditionally engaged<sup>1</sup> individuals find it difficult to break through and get heard.

Among the positives, though, is the results of the pearl voting by Nuva Ry. When presented with the statement “I feel like my voice matters”, an impressive 84% said yes while only 16% said no. And so, while there might be a lack of attention to young people, young people themselves feel that their voices *do* matter.



We have to listen young people  
Let the youth's voice be heard

**Illustration 1.2:** Let the youth's voice be heard (Source: Buen & Engen)

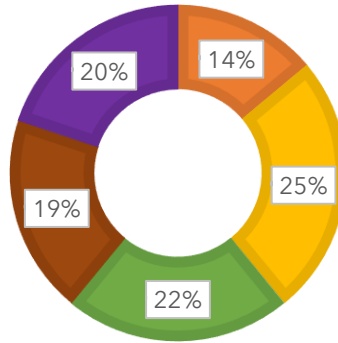
## Structural difficulties

When asked about the biggest challenges that young people face in Nordic countries, the lack of attention to and inclusion of young voices pops up as a general concern. Perhaps unsurprising, the previous section's numbers taken into consideration, but nonetheless interesting as the question refers to *the* biggest challenge(s). Completing the four biggest challenges according to our respondents is *discrimination*, *mental health*, and *climate crisis*.

<sup>1</sup> Traditionally engaged in this context refers to members of youth councils and political organizations.

## WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES THAT YOUNG PEOPLE FACE IN NORDIC COUNTRIES? MENTION AS MANY AS YOU THINK ABOUT.

■ Climate crisis ■ Mental health ■ Discrimination ■ Being heard ■ Other

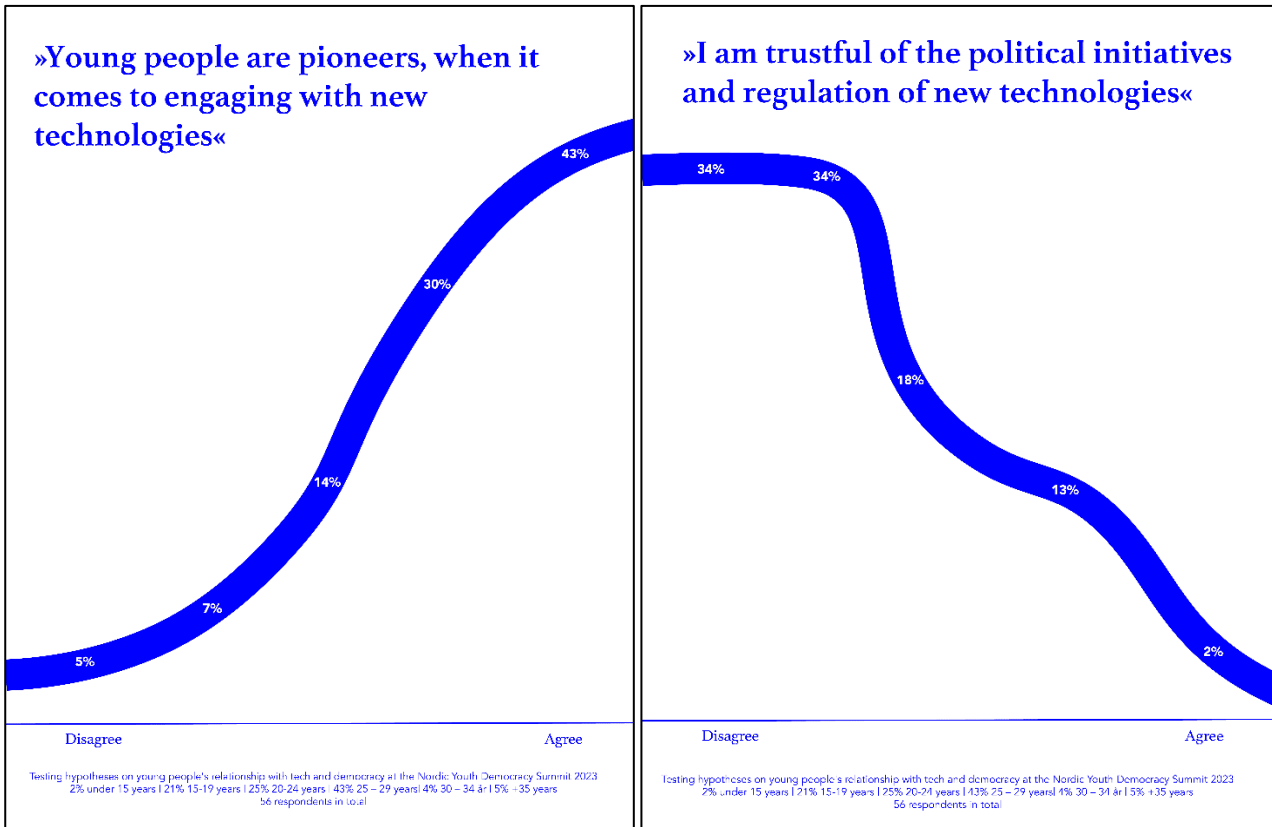


**Illustration 1.3:** Biggest challenges that young people face in Nordic countries (Source: Cluster & Margin survey)

As shown in the chart, the four biggest challenges according to our respondents makes up a whopping 86% of the total. The remaining fifth “other” category contains every topic that isn’t associated with one of the big four, and, as such, the responses somewhat demonstrate a consensus among the respondents about what is to be viewed as the biggest challenges. One can wonder why *climate crisis*, arguably the greatest fight fueled by the young generation, is bottom of the top four, but as the question in place aims at the biggest challenges that *young* people face in Nordic countries, an explanation could be that the climate crisis is an “obvious” call and can be seen as the biggest challenge for humanity in general, while there might be something more generational and individual, yet structural, about *mental health*, *discrimination* and *being heard*. Or, should we add, it could simply be the case that the top three are seriously tough challenges in the minds of the young generation, and, therefore, are not to be underestimated in their importance.

### Young people as pioneers

Young people fighting to make a change in relation to climate crisis has been documented on a daily basis in years, and their struggles have often been explained by and labelled as a “generational gap” between young activists and older people in power, a dynamic noticeably embodied through relentless Swedish activist Greta Thunberg versus politicians worldwide. However, while the climate crisis might be the biggest talking point, it is not the only theme prone to intergenerational challenges and disagreements. Enter *digital technology*.



**Illustration 1.4 & 1.5.: Tech pioneers & Tech trust** (Source: Future)

Ungdomsbureauet's project *Future* works in the cross field between technology and democracy with a special focus on young people's knowledge, engagement, and influence. Among other things, the project explores the dilemma that technologies evolve faster than democracy and human adapting, and therefore are - and have always been - increasingly difficult to introduce and regulate accordingly within societies. So, how do we keep up with the pace?

Asked directly if young people are pioneers when it comes to engaging with new technologies, 73% declared that they mostly or completely agree, with 14% somewhat agreeing. When asked if they are trustful of the political initiatives and regulation of new technologies, 68% declared that they mostly or completely disagree, with 18% somewhat disagreeing. This highlights a clear imbalance: The respondents largely see themselves as pioneers, but they don't trust the ones in power, which leads us back to the intergenerational challenge. The most important thing to notice is the lack of trust, and that presents a democratic issue that needs to be addressed.

Part I focusing on democracy has presented some important reflections and statements from our young Nordic respondents. Without drawing any conclusions per se, the data gives food for thought as it highlights a feeling of not being heard and an overall common experience of structural issues, with the realm of digital technologies being a hands-on example of the challenges combined: Large-scale decisions being made with a lack of young voices, even though the young voices find themselves qualified to have a say.

Moving on, we will take a look at young people's view on participation and their own effort.







# PART II

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

## PART II: Civic engagement

In the following, we will explore how Nordic youth view engagement and participation while also assessing their own efforts, strengths, and struggles. Among the findings is that participation according to the respondents is mainly linked to the feeling of being part of something. Most of the respondents are involved in their local society and have a quite broad scope on participation but some are not, and some does not feel safe enough to engage and express themselves.

### Being part of something

When talking about “civic engagement” and “participation”, what do we even mean? As teased earlier in this report, civic engagement and participation in a traditional sense often refers to being a member or an active part of youth councils or political organizations. Although that *is* engagement and participation, there are loads of other options. We asked our respondents what participation means to them, and the answers are difficult to summarize or quantify, but what stands out is that quite many of our respondents simply replied: “Being part of something”.

Looking a little bit closer at the answers, the notion of being part of something seems to require one of two steps: (1) showing up, and (2) getting involved. This distinction opens up the possibility of a passive and an active role for the participant, and in relation to the former many respondents gave answers like “being able to” and “having the possibility to” be part of a decision-making process. In that case, it is a question of access that makes participation possible in that one can choose to show up and, thus, *participate* whether active or passive. On the active part, many respondents view participation as a case of speaking up and being directly involved by expressing themselves in relation to something. Meanwhile, respondents also stress the importance of *listening* to others, which is kind of in the middle of the active-passive continuum - and it signals an understanding of participation where listening is among the first thoughts for the respondents, putting others before themselves.

### From youth councils to beer serving

According to our data, 76% of respondents find themselves involved in their local communities, whether that be associations, activism, sports, etc., and while that number might be high, it also tells a story about 24% not viewing themselves as involved in their local communities. And by “*viewing* themselves”, we want to emphasize the premise that it is based on one’s own personal feeling or experience, as in; respondents can - seen from the outside - be involved without feeling or realizing it, and correspondingly, respondents can feel involved even if it doesn’t look like it from the outside. If we accept *being part of something* and *access* as the base of participation it is likely that even more of the respondents are sort of involved, objectively.

When asked *how* the respondents are involved, the answers range from “serving beer” to “youth council” with the latter being the absolute frontrunner as visualized in the following word cloud.



**Illustration 2.1:** Participation word cloud (Based on data from Cluster & Margin)

The biggest words in the word cloud highlight the most frequent responses, and as we can see, youth council takes the 1<sup>st</sup> spot, while “volunteering” comes second and “scouts”, “events”, “UN”, “sports”, and various youth/political organizations create the sub-top field of involvement. The size of youth council is hardly a surprise as we teamed up with our partner organizations to recruit a lot of participants through various local youth councils, and therefore, youth councils are not necessarily to be viewed as *the* main participation form. Nonetheless, it stands out that many respondents are in some way politically active and think of their participation as exactly that, but the other answers broaden the scope as they represent just as valuable alternative forms of participation, exemplified with “friends”, “yoga”, “festival”, “children’s crisis center” or “sustainability club”.

## More engagement forms, more inclusion

When we asked the not-involved 24% of the respondents if something keeps them from participating and if they needed any resources, surprisingly many responses were “no”. Quite interesting, considering that *something* maybe keeps them from participating even though they might not be aware of exactly what it is. It could be a positive sign as nothing *specifically* keeps them from participating, which makes it all the more likely that they would someday take part. On the other hand, one could argue that it is a bad sign because nothing really prevents them from participating, and yet they don’t do it. Had the question been focusing on what *could* get them engaged rather than what keeps them from it, the answers might have been completely different as



they might have found it easier to voice what they want, rather than what they don't want. Either way, a blatant "no" to the question is interesting.

The primary reasons being mentioned as to what keeps the respondents from participating are *time, energy, and motivation*, and some respondents even label themselves as "lazy". A few respondents also explained that their reluctance to participate is due to different mental barriers which is linked to premises, formats, and contexts for participation. One is shy, one is fearful of not fitting in, one has anxiety, and one finds that rooms for participation are often unsafe. This is crucial to have in mind; people are different and might have different needs for participating, and this underlines the importance of access as highlighted earlier. If you don't feel that you can enter the room, you don't have the chance to participate - a reminder to everyone working with youth and participation that we must consider various engagement forms in order to enhance accessibility and, thereby, participation.

An example of an alternative, safer space for participation is Voksenåsen's *confession tree* where respondents anonymously wrote down opinions that they wouldn't dare to say to others. This allowed for shy, insecure or ideologically marginalized people to freely express themselves with no pressure. The rules of the activity enabled another dimension of democratic participation that "normal" debate spaces wouldn't do, and there were quite some answers to prove that:

"I think it is hard to live up to most climate initiatives. I do like meat and don't want to take trains everywhere when I can get somewhere faster by plane"

"Death penalty should be introduced"

"Why is everything vegetarian"

"I quit being feminist for my boyfriend"

"Sometimes I want to cut the ties to my family because they don't understand me"

"I don't feel bad about flying"

"Communism would be perfect, BUT - we're humans/selfish"

"I think it's difficult when people have other opinions than mine"

"I'm d\*mn tired of my boomer uncle always saying racist and homophobic things"

"Pineapple doesn't belong on pizza"

As is evident here, the range in statements is rather impressive with everything from ditching the family to fighting pineapple on pizza. The latter might seem ridiculous, but it all adds up and tells a story about democracy and participation in the eyes of our respondents: There are certain things that are not always easy to address in the spaces we usually create for debate or discussion, and therefore we must broaden our scope when making room for expressions.



# PART III

## SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP



## PART III: Social entrepreneurship

In part I with *democracy* as main theme, it was argued that the biggest challenges faced by Nordic youth are structural issues; climate crisis, mental health, discrimination and not being heard. Additionally, in part II about civic engagement it was argued that participation relies on being part of something which requires accessibility, and while many are involved in their local communities and have a wide perception of participation, an even broader scope is needed if we are to include everyone. Now, having gotten to part III, we will focus on social entrepreneurship and the hopes of finding solutions to current and future challenges.

Just to clarify, by “social entrepreneurship” we refer in general to organizations and/or companies that aim to make a positive change in relation to societal matters. However, initiatives like events and festivals fit within our scope as they can serve the same function of making positive change and are often created by said organizations and/or companies.

### Nordic collaboration is key

Asked how young people from different Nordic countries can work together to take part in solving the challenges, three words stand out in the responses: Together. Common. Sharing. The majority of the answers (52,9%) specifically find that more cross-border Nordic collaboration is key, with the primary task being listening and learning from each other. Some examples of the suggestions are “networks across borders”, “online conferences”, “international meeting spaces”, and, as a pleasant surprise for us, a lot of calls for “events like this”. We will get back to the latter in the next section, but in general it seems that both digital and physical meetings are welcome.



**Illustration 3.1:** Together connected (source: Buen & Engen)

As one of the interviewees put it:

I think if we are to make change, not just in the Nordic area, but so that it is global, we need to come together and kind of show that we are strong, we are united, and this is the kind of way the world should be going, not just us. I think it's very good that we have people and organizations from all around the Nordics coming together, sharing ideas and kind of showing that there's a large will to kind of impact social change. (Finnish person, source: Cluster & Margin interview)

The strength in being united as a region across multiple countries has the potential to get change going quicker and more efficiently, according to this respondent. And as other respondents point out, getting together might not only result in quicker change, but be of actual necessity to create change in the first place, at least among youth:

We need to work together and bring solidarity to dismantle the colonial unsustainable system and build a future where we can all flourish (Åland person, source: KRK Inua)

To empower Nordic youth, you have to get the politicians to listen. When there are so many youths that together are being on the festival. Making the festival. Then you have a lot of power. (Norwegian person, source: Cluster & Margin interview)

This is directly linked to the youth involvement challenge mentioned earlier, and it highlights one of the possible strengths with physical meetings: A belief that even though young people can sit in their respective countries experiencing the same issue with being omitted or ignored in decision making processes, when they get together and actually team up in numbers, they can gain power and become impossible to ignore. At least for a certain amount of time. And with this, it's time to move on to the festival as an arena for youth power - now and in the future.

## **The future is festival?**

Now this will look a little self-congratulating, and it might as well be exactly that, but...: When asked what young Nordic people can do to help solve societal challenges, a significant amount (10%) of respondents unsolicited pointed to Ungdommens Folkemøde NORD as an example of what needs to be done more in the future. While 10% does not necessarily look like a lot, it adds some weight when considering that the respondents had the chance to pick whatever action they could possibly imagine. Combined with the cries for meetings and places for getting together, sharing and learning, it seems that the festival format could work as a good option for social entrepreneurship when combating the challenges assessed earlier in the report.

An elaborated claim in favor of the festival concept confirms:

I think that if we can come together in forums such as this festival, we can get our networking contacts, we can collaborate. And I really believe in the saying that we are stronger together. And I think that these types of events are really good at building bonds and strengthening us together. And I think that's really cool and really important, and it has given me a lot. (Swedish person, source: Cluster & Margin interview)

But what is it that the festival format has got to offer? And more specifically, what have the respondents taken with them from their visit at Ungdommens Folkemøde NORD 2023? As a first, 100% of respondents answered 'yes' when asked if the festival inspired them to participate in a Nordic community or collaboration, and when looking at the more qualitative responses on what inspired them, there are some fine examples:



Meeting other nordic youth made me realize that we are many that are interested in the same stuff. Also it was very educative hearing different people speak about what is going on in different country and what they do to make a difference (Norwegian, source: Cluster & Margin survey)

Instead of reading statistics I could now see how many young people who share my beliefs, hopes, and fears for the future. It made me feel hopeful that there are many other who wants to make a change too, which inspired me a lot. (Swedish person, source: Cluster & Margin survey)

These two have the *identification* in common; the realization that other young people from other Nordic countries are interested in the same stuff and maybe even think and believe the same way. Especially the second quote points out something important in that the physical meeting at the festival made way for an experience that goes beyond what simple statistics can tell. Even though we come up with reports presenting this and that in numeric terms, nothing comes close to the real-life experience, and *that* is valuable to remember. In addition to this, the social aspect of meeting each other in real-life also plays its part. When asked what the best experience was at the festival, 39% of respondents went with statements like "meeting people" and "new friends". Considering the amount of stage content and organization activities that headlined the festival and presented itself as *the* big experiences, the emphasis on the social aspect from the respondents underlines the value of getting together.

With the calls for more meetings between Nordic youth, an apparent great power in strengthening the togetherness between young people in the Nordic region, and specific suggestions that events like Ungdommens Folkemøde NORD could be the way to go in the future, there is reason to believe that festivals and other social events with activities focusing on democracy and societal matters may act as platforms for empowering and engaging more of our Nordic youth.

## Summary

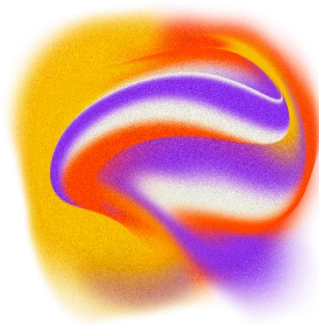
From the very beginning, Ungdommens Folkemøde NORD has had as main goal to strengthen the democratic self-confidence among Nordic youth and increase the collaboration and feeling of togetherness across the borders. Although we can't use this report to conclude that the festival achieved its goal, we can say that there are clear indications that it moved in the right direction.

Through a patchwork of data collected through multiple sources during the festival and in its aftermath, we have explored a lot of thoughts, reflections, expressions, and statements from our young Nordic participants. These have been divided into the three pillars of this report: Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Social Entrepreneurship. The analytic approach has been openly declared as biased with our subjective assessments an integral part of the sensemaking of the data, and so the report is to be read with that in mind.

Part I focusing on democracy highlights a feeling of not being heard and an overall common experience of structural issues, with the realm of digital technologies being a hands-on example of the challenges combined: Large-scale decisions being made with a lack of young voices, even though the young voices find themselves qualified to have a say.

Part II about civic engagement states that participation according to the respondents is mainly linked to the feeling of being part of something. Most of the respondents are involved in their local communities and have a wide perception of participation, but an even broader scope is needed if we are to include everyone.

Part III on social entrepreneurship argues that cross-border Nordic collaboration is key according to the respondents. With the calls for more meetings between Nordic youth, an apparent great power in strengthening the togetherness between young people in the Nordic region, and specific suggestions that events like Ungdommens Folkemøde NORD could be the way to go in the future, there is reason to believe that festivals or other social events with focus on democracy and societal matters may be beneficial in empowering our Nordic youth.





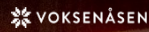




# UNGDOMMENS FOLKEMØDE | **NORD**

a project by

**UNGDOMSBUREAUET**



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KNUD HØJGAARDS FOND

