

The background features a network of blue, green, and purple lines with circular nodes. On the left, there are several mouse cursor icons in green and purple. On the right, there is a stylized map of Europe with various icons like a laptop, a smartphone, and a speech bubble. At the bottom right, a globe is depicted with network lines and nodes.

OpenEU

The Open  
European  
University

# OpenEU Festival: The Open Canvas of Democracy

October 23–25, 2026 | A 3 day online festival



## Democracy as an institution.

Parliaments. Courtrooms.  
Polling stations.



## Democracy as a lived human practice.

Listening to someone we  
disagree with. Designing  
Organizing a workplace.  
Caring for **communities.**

**We are looking for researchers, practitioners, students, and storytellers to co-create a live democratic experiment.**

# This is Not a Conference.

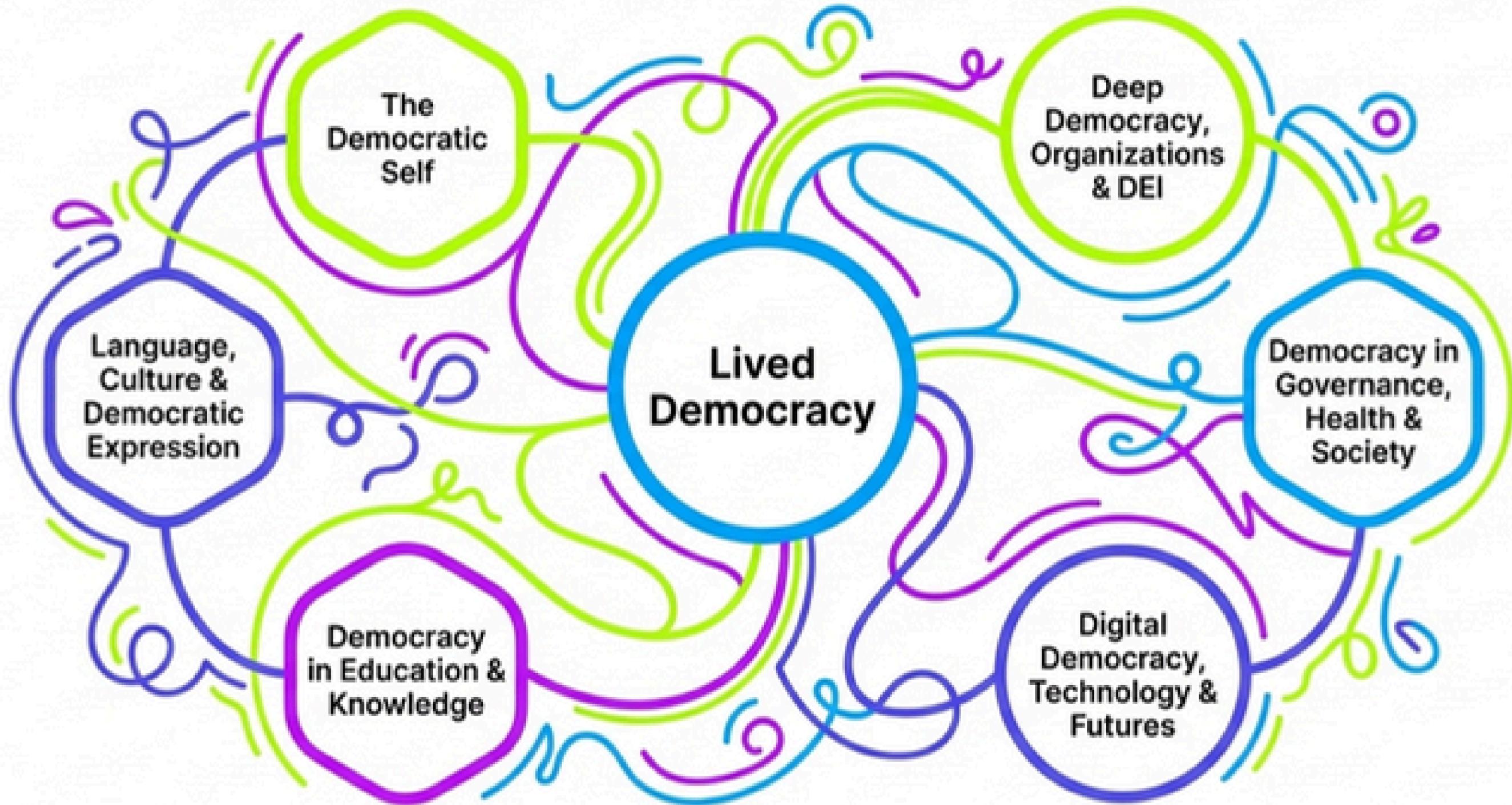
## The Traditional Conference

- Rows of passive listeners staring at slide decks.
- Long lecture sessions.
- Panels where five experts talk at you for an hour.
- A neutral moderator reading off a script.
- Goal: One-way knowledge transfer.

## The OpenEU Festival

- Active participants shaping the conversation and flow
- Short, dynamic TED-style provocations (20 min + 10 min Q&A).
- Everyone participates (polls, breakout rooms, shared canvases).
- Curious, intervening hosts who challenge and connect dots.
- Goal: Shared experience and reflection.

# The Thematic Landscape



# The Festival Experience



## The Warm Interruption

Imagine presenting a decade of research, only to be warmly interrupted by the host because fifty people in the chat just raised an urgent question. The conversation goes where it needs to.



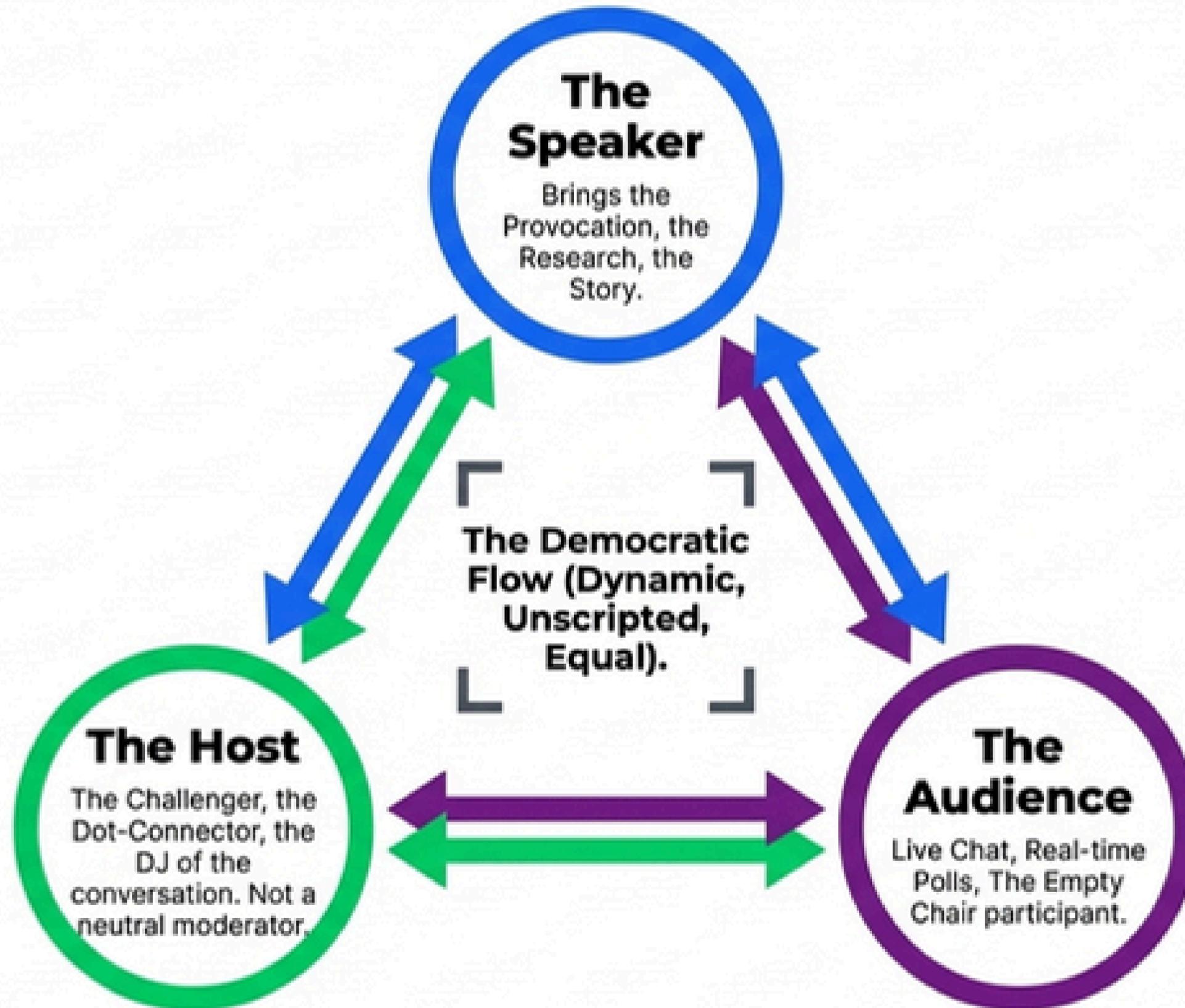
## The Provocation

Start not with a heavy PowerPoint, but with a story, a provocation, or a question you genuinely do not know the answer to.

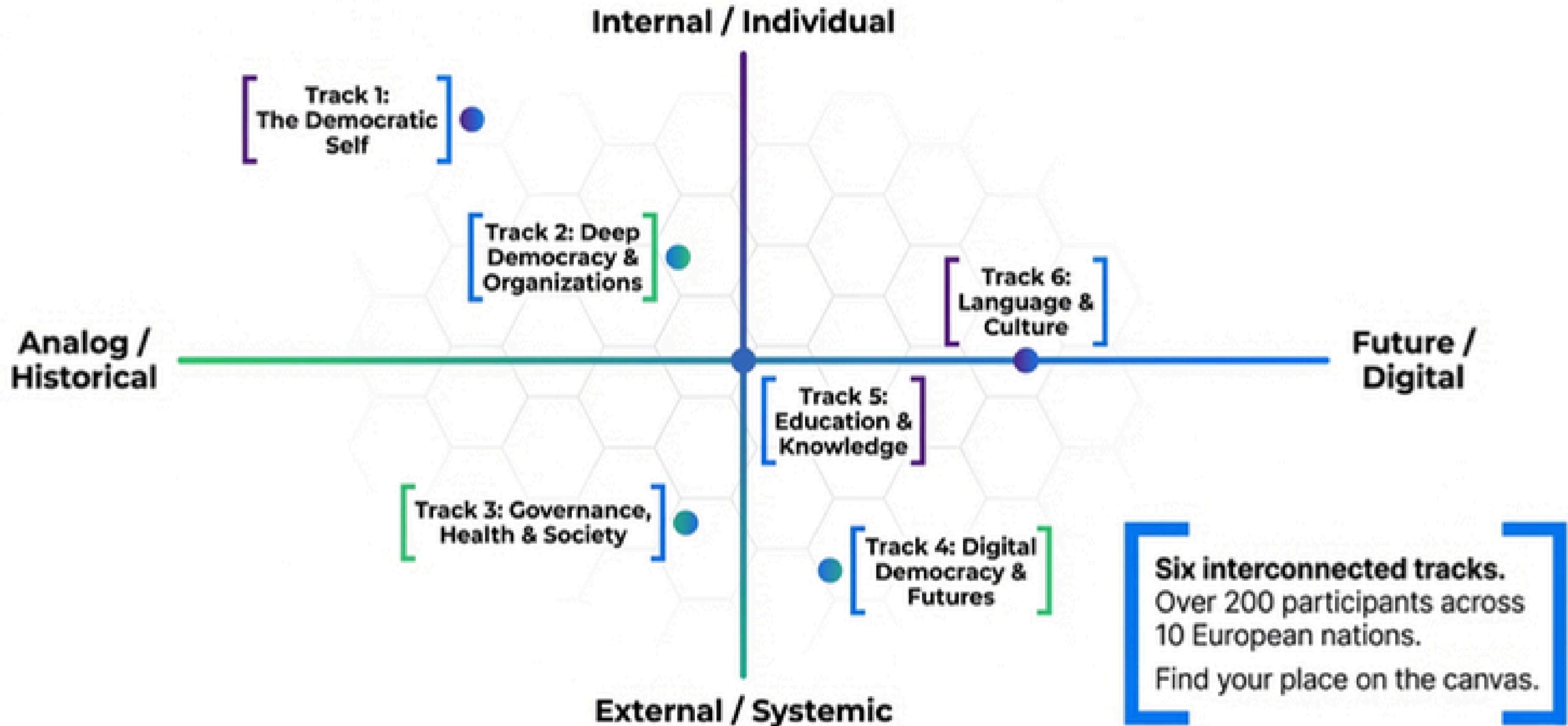


## The Active Audience

The audience is not waiting to clap. They are voting on directions, dropping ideas into a shared canvas, and shaping what happens next.



# The Track Spectrum: Map Your Expertise



# Six Tracks of Inspiration.

We have created six thematic tracks to spark your creativity. These are not exhaustive categories, but starting points for non-partisan, accessible dialogue aligned with EU core values (human dignity, freedom, equality, the rule of law, and human rights).



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● Track 1 — The Democratic Self

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● Track 2 — Deep Democracy, Organizations & DEI

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● Track 3 — Democracy in Governance, Health & Society

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● Track 4 — Digital Democracy, Technology & Futures

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● Track 5 — Democracy in Education & Knowledge

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● Track 6 — Language, Culture, History & Democratic Expression

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# Topic examples

## Track 1 — The Democratic Self

How do we become democratic citizens — from the inside out? Exploring the psychological, philosophical, and personal dimensions of democratic life, taking seriously the barriers that prevent people from having a voice.

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**Democratic Participation as a Skill,**  
not just a legal right

**The Psychology of Citizenship:**  
conflict transformation and listening

**Inner Development Goals (IDGs)** for  
democratic participation

**Democratic Dialogue:** Thinking,  
Listening & Disagreeing Well

**Mental Health Days as Democratic  
Acts:** care as a right, not a luxury

**Long COVID/MECFS & Democratic  
Participation:** chronic illness as a  
barrier to voice

**The Right to Rest as a Democratic  
Right**

**Who Gets to Decide What's Normal?**  
Neurodiversity, autism, ADHD &  
democratic norms

**Mad Pride:** When Psychiatric Survivors  
Organize

**Care Is Political, Not Personal:** disability,  
care work & democratic structures

**Ableism in Democratic Spaces:**  
recognizing and dismantling barriers

**Crip Time:** When Democracy Moves  
Too Fast

**Does Truth Matter for Democracy?**  
Post-truth politics & philosophical  
foundations

**Democracy Is Slow. Authoritarians  
Get Shit Done. So What?**

**What Do We Owe to People Who Hate  
Democracy?** The tolerance paradox

**The Trolley Problem Is About  
Democracy:** philosophical foundations  
of democratic choice

**Can Democracy Survive Stupidity?**  
The epistocracy debate

## Track 2 — Deep Democracy, Organizations & DEI

# *What does real democratic practice look like inside teams, companies, and institutions?*

Bridging theory and practice to explore democratic models (holacracy, sociocracy) applied to real organizational life, neurodivergent teams, and systemic constraints.

**Deep Democracy:** theory, practice, and lived experience

**Democracy as a Concept:** what it actually means beyond voting

**Holacracy, Sociocracy & Beyond:** scientific research on applying democracy in organizations

**When a Small Group Still Holds All the Power:** the limits of holacracy in practice

**Workplace Democracy & Participatory Management**

**Democracy Within Companies:** from boardrooms to self-managed teams

**Democracy and DEI:** how inclusion shapes and is shaped by democratic structures

**Deep Democracy in Neurodivergent Teams:** do democratic structures help or harm?

**How Neurodivergent Voices Change Democratic Outcomes** in Organizations

**The 4-Day Workweek:** it's about power, not productivity

**From Consumers to Citizens:** stewardship of shared resources

**Fast Fashion Democracy:** who decides what gets made and worn?

**Your Rent Keeps Going Up and You Can't Vote About It:** housing as democratic failure

**Nothing About Us Without Us:** disability rights as organizational principle

**Accessible Democracy:** more than just ramps

# Topic examples

## Track 3 — Democracy in Governance, Health & Society

Who has power, who is left out, and how do we rebuild trust? Examining how democratic values are contested across legal, political, health, and civic structures, and how we hold power accountable.

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**Trust, Accountability & Democratic Transparency**

**Ethics and Restorative Justice**

**Is It Democratic to Ban Anti-Democratic Parties?** Germany's defensive democracy

**Your Rights End Where Mine Begin. But Where Is That Line?** Freedom vs. harm

**Societal Resilience & Citizens' Engagement:** European Democracy Shield

**Civil Dialogue as Prerequisite for Democratic Legitimacy**

**My Body, Their Vote:** reproductive rights and democratic backlash

**Why Can't We Die on Our Own Terms?** Euthanasia, autonomy & democratic taboos

**Vaccine Mandates:** where does your freedom end and mine begin?

**Why Do Anti-Vaxxers Exist in the Age of Google?** Information vs. trust

**Your Doctor Googled Your Symptoms:** medical knowledge democratization

**Rural vs. Urban:** the democratic divide in voice and power

**Urban Democracy:** who decides your city's future?

**Borders, Walls & Democratic Belonging:** geographic mobility and citizenship

**Climate Migration Is Already Here:** geographic displacement & democratic rights

**Should Trees Have Voting Rights?** Legal personhood for nature

## Track 4 – Digital Democracy, Technology & Futures

# *Who controls the tools and systems that shape our collective future?*

Exploring digital infrastructure, AI deliberation, and the design of democratic systems for the challenges of the coming decades.

**AI in Citizens' Assemblies:** scaling democratic quality and institutional capacity

**Augmented Deliberation:** AI to cluster citizen viewpoints in real-time

**AI as Tool for Representation, Not Substitute**

**Navigating Disinformation:** maintaining agency in a digital world

**Taiwan's Digital Democracy Experiment**

**Estonia's E-Residency:** Can You Be a Digital Citizen?

**Technological Sovereignty:** building independent democratic digital infrastructure

**Europe as Digital Colony?** Resisting tech dependency

**The Right to Repair as Radical Democracy**

**Smart Contracts & Democratic Ownership** at the local level

**Why Voting Machines Can't Be Trusted**

**Your City Council Meetings Are on YouTube. Nobody Watches:** democratic infrastructure design

**Digital Nomads Are Rewriting Citizenship:** place-independent democracy

**Long-termism & Intergenerational Justice:** Guardians for Future Generations

**Anticipatory Governance:** how policy professionals navigate global change

**Futures Literacy:** using the future to change what we do in the present

**How Can AI Help Current Citizens Negotiate Fairly with Future Generations?**

**Circular Economy Requires Circular Institutions**

**Democracy as Infrastructure:** radical civic ownership of shared resources

**Citizen Science:** crowdsourced truth-telling against institutional failure

**Open Science vs. Publish or Perish:** democratizing academic knowledge

**Peer Review Is Broken. Can We Crowdfund Scientific Truth?**

**The Math That Proves Voting Systems Are Broken:** Arrow's Impossibility Theorem

**Your Phone's Battery Is Mining Violence:** rare earth minerals & democratic supply chains

**Flat Earthers Aren't Stupid, They're Democratic:** why conspiracy theories thrive

# Topic examples

## Track 5 — Democracy in Education & Knowledge

Who gets to learn, teach, and decide what counts as knowledge? Tensions between academic freedom, access, institutional prestige, and the role of students as democratic actors within their alliances.

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### **Student Voice in University**

**Governance:** students as democratic actors in their institutions

**OpenEU and the Democratization of Higher Education in Europe:** students in governing boards

**The TikTok University:** When Students Teach Each Other — peer-to-peer learning

**Teaching Democracy or Teaching Democratically?** Is pedagogy democratic?

### **Free Education as a Democratic**

**Right:** tuition, debt & access to knowledge

**Decolonizing the Curriculum:** whose knowledge gets taught?

**The Hidden Curriculum:** what schools really teach about authority and power

**Grade Inflation or Democratic Education?** Assessment as power structure

**Trigger Warnings or Academic Freedom?** Safety vs. intellectual challenge

**The University Strike:** when students and staff unite

**Open Educational Resources:** Wikipedia for Everything?

**Disabled Students Taught Us About Flexible Learning:** pandemic lessons and universal design

**The OpenEU Micro-Degree on European Values and Democracy**

# Topic examples

## Track 6 — Language, Culture, History & Democratic Expression

How does culture — and the language we speak — shape, challenge, and inspire democracy? The cultural, artistic, linguistic, and historical dimensions of democratic life, proving that communication access is a prerequisite for equal participation.

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**Why Languages Matter in Democracy:** how language barriers prevent full participation

**Music Blending Cultures to Reflect Shared Democratic Values**

**Bernie's Mittens Won the Internet:** meme art and political power

**Language Diversity and Multilingualism as a Result and Requirement of Democracy**

**Art as Political Risk:** from protest murals to dissident performance

**Failed Democracies:** lessons from Weimar, Ancient Rome & beyond

**Language as a Tool for Equal Participation:** translation, interpretation & plain language

**Banksy vs. Advertising:** who owns public space?

**Forgotten Democratic Innovations:** sortition, citizen juries & lost practices

**Equality Through Language Access:** reducing barriers and empowering minority languages

**Eurovision's Secret Democratic Power:** music and European identity

**How Voting Rights Were Won (and Lost, and Won Again)**

**Plain Language Movements and Accessibility in Democratic Communication**

**Fandom as Political Organizing:** how pop culture shapes participation

**The Museum Gave Back the Stolen Artifacts. Now What?** Repatriation & historical justice

**Social Media Language Trends and Youth Democratic Expression**

**Graffiti Is a Vote:** why cities criminalize visual dissent

**Your Grandchildren's Lawyer:** intergenerational democracy lessons from history

**Media, Arts & Expression:** theatre, poetry, and social media as platforms for public voice

**Your Spotify Wrapped Is Propaganda:** cultural algorithms and identity

**Climate Scientists Are Gluing Themselves to Roads:** when expertise meets activism

# Selection Criteria.

We are looking for speakers, researchers, practitioners, and storytellers who bring fresh, inspiring perspectives.

## Related to theme

Addresses democracy as a lived practice.

## Inspiring

Provokes thought, dialogue, and new perspectives.

## Non-partisan

Focuses on human experience and systems, not party politics.

## Accessible

Designed for a broad audience across disciplines and backgrounds.

## Innovative

Breaks away from standard lecture formats.

## Aligned with EU values

Upholds human dignity, freedom, equality, rule of law, and human rights.

The Deadline:

**May  
30,  
2026**

## Selection Criteria

-  Related to theme
-  Inspiring
-  Non-partisan
-  Accessible to a broad audience
-  Innovative
-  Aligned with EU values (human dignity, freedom, equality, rule of law, human rights)

Submit your proposal:

<https://forms.gle/rr67QWPpuWdj3WM9A>

Questions? Contact:

[openeufestival@gmail.com](mailto:openeufestival@gmail.com)



**Come ready to think.**  
**Come ready to talk back.**  
**Come ready to be surprised.**

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We look forward to your submissions. Let's build the canvas together.