Reimagining Participation: Exploring the Youth Democracy Festival Method as a Framework for Civic Innovation

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Abstract: Youth Democracy Festivals (YDFs) have emerged across Europe as creative and participatory spaces where young people experience democracy through dialogue, co-creation, and celebration. This paper explores the existing YDF method, mapping its origins, evolution, and typologies within broader traditions of cultural, educational, and grassroots festivals. Drawing on comparative analysis from Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Poland, and Lithuania, the study identifies YDFs as hybrid models combining deliberative democracy, informal learning, and community engagement. The research conceptualizes YDFs through five interlinked models—governance, program, communication, inclusion, and sustainability—each shaping how youth participation becomes both experiential and transformative. By positioning YDFs as laboratories of civic innovation rather than one-off events, the paper argues that these festivals contribute to building democratic resilience and social cohesion across borders. The findings offer a general framework for institutions seeking to embed youth-led participatory cultures in regional and European democratic practices.