# Overcoming polarization in crises
# A research project on trauma and democracy with over 350 citizens

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The complexity and dynamics of current crises pose major challenges to democracy. In crises, fears grow and social polarization increases. Crises also evoke personal and collective traumatic memories. Finding orientation and cohesion becomes an urgent task for the preservation of democracy.

The research question posed in this project is: **Can understanding and more consciously dealing with collective trauma dynamics help strengthen our democracy and overcome polarization?**

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**Further information about the project can be found here:**
https://pocketproject.org/collective-trauma-democracy/
https://www.mehr-demokratie.de/projekte/deepening-democracy/pocket-project

# Foreword and Acknowledgements

*"In every story there is history, we carry history within us, and because of that we have a voice."*

(Micro-story of a participant)

This report presents the results of a large group process over several days to jointly explore the relationship between collective trauma, social polarization and democracy. The process was realized in cooperation between Pocket Project e. V. and Mehr Demokratie e. V., led by Thomas Hübl, and brought together more than 350 people. At the center of the research on trauma, polarization and democracy presented here are the experiences and attributions of meaning of the participants in the form of stories (narratives). Narrative landscapes emerge as participants self-assessed their stories in terms of qualities of experience that were essential to them. These narrative landscapes provide us with information about how citizens interpret the new, often ambiguous and challenging events in the context of cur-rent social crises and derive meaning and actions from them.

Based on a systematic analysis of the stories, this report illuminates trends and sketches an initial map providing insights on personal as well as societal, conscious as well as unconscious attempts to orient ourselves in a time of crisis. While the surveying of our outer world is already largely complete, the cartography of our inner, both individual-psychological and shared cultural, social and political landscapes, with all their depths and blind spots, has only just begun. We were touched by the many voices of participants who shared their inner experiences in the context of present and past crises. Exemplifying this, a project participant stated: "In every story there is history, we carry history within us, and therefore we have a voice." Which voices are heard then? And which voices are not considered in the shaping of a democratic society? In the context of trauma, what is evidently absent is crucial.

We invite you, dear readers, to explore the many-voiced narrative landscapes and look forward to your feedback and further suggestions!

Please, send feedback on the overall project to Kosha Joubert (info@pocketproject.org) and Roman Huber (roman.huber@mehr-demokratie.de). Please, send feedback on this report and research to Adrian Wagner (adrian.wagner@eusg.org).

This project could only be realized through the polyphony of the participants. Our heartfelt thanks goes first and foremost to all the participants for their trust in sharing their stories with us. We are very touched by the intimacy and depth of the narrations. We would have loved to give all 643 stories a place in this report!

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# Synopsis

In view of the simultaneity and complexity of the societal crises currently taking place, democracy is coming under increasing pressure. The climate crisis, the loss of biodiversity, and not least the corona pandemic have led to great uncertainty and dynamics of division at many levels, in private and social life. The war events in Ukraine contribute to further excessive demands and emotional shock as well as distrust in politics. In order to better understand the principles of social polarization and to find starting points for overcoming them, the application-oriented research project "Overcoming Polarization in Crises" was initiated. It aims to capture unconscious, collective dynamics, for which Pocket Project e. V. and Mehr Demokratie e. V. have joined forces with various scientific partners. The guiding question was: Can understanding and dealing more consciously with collective trauma dynamics help to strengthen our democracy and overcome polarization?

This initial question emerged through the consideration that in increasingly complex social situations the development and negotiation of meaning and meaningfulness is an essential feature of political processes and decision-making. At the same time, crises can act as catalysts of fragmentation, as they evoke unprocessed traumatic material stored in collective memory. Unprocessed experiences and associated emotions are activated and trigger unconscious dynamics. As a result, individual and collective sense-making is disrupted. The decisive factor would then be how unconscious (often also transgenerational) contents of the collective memory can be reconnected and related. According to sociologist Hartmut Rosa, resonance is central to this. His "Sociology of World Relationship" makes an important contribution to theoretically linking resonance capacity, democracy and trauma (Rosa 2016, own translation). Resonance capacity is based on openness to share even contradictory and challenging contexts of meaning and not to repress them. Collective practices of remembering, which also take into account emotions such as disquiet, fear, mistrust and grief, are attributed great importance here (see Chapter 2.2 Theoretical foundations).

Against this background, the core of the research project was a three-day so-called trauma-informed large group process in which more than 350 citizens participated online. The group process served to jointly explore the experience of current crises, democracy and polarization as well as individual and collective traumas. The focus was on conscious awareness of personal, emotional, cognitive and physical processes as well as the relationship to others and to the group as a whole. An essential learning moment was the establishment of a "meta-communication", i.e. a communication in the here and now about the ongoing events, by means of which usually unconscious contents and dynamics can be reflected on together. The process of witnessing, in the sense of recognizing and acknowledging personal or collective realities, was another core element (see Chapter 3.3 The trauma-informed large group process).

The theoretical basis of the research project links different approaches, including those from political science, sociology, psychology and trauma research. "Sensemaking" (or "Sinnbildung" or also "Sinngebung" in German) functions as a connecting key concept, which can be found in all the disciplines mentioned and thus enables a bridging function. The concept of sensemaking was introduced by Weick in the 1970s to investigate and better understand the complex dynamics in organizations and other social systems (Weick 1995). Sensemaking is the process that enables people to make sense of the multitude of sensory impressions in the stream of experience, to orient themselves within it, and also to communicate it in retrospect through a structured narrative. How people make sense of their lives and the world can be seen in the stories, the many little anecdotes and narratives they share in everyday life (Fisher 1985, see Chapter 2.2 Theoretical foundations).

In the form of short stories (micro-stories), the participants in the research project were able to describe and evaluate their personal experience of democracy in the current political and social situation. For entering and rating the stories, the participants used a special software (SenseMaker by Cognitive Edge). The total of 643

short stories, additional data from participatory observation as well as from focus groups before and after the large group process, provided a rich, complementary data base. The data were analysed using a qualitative-interpretative and exploratory research approach. The objective here was to gain a deeper understanding of the intersections of sensemaking, crises and social polarization as well as collective trauma. The findings are subject to certain limitations. They are not readily generalizable or transferable to the population as a whole, but require contextualization for this purpose. Nor is this impact research in the narrower sense of rigorously proving cause-and-effect causalities. Rather, the research project makes a fundamental contribution to the elaboration of patterns, trends and interrelationships in the complex assemblage of trauma, crisis and democracy. It is thus a pioneering piece of academic work that encourages further research into mentioned interrelationships (see Chapter 3.4 Survey instruments and Chapter 3.6 Limitations).

The evaluation of the micro-stories allows the well-founded assessment that the participants' relationship to the lived practice of democracy changed within the framework of the group process. While the stories at the beginning of the process express a good deal of distance and disenchantment with politics, the stories at the end of the process demonstrate a clearly strengthened confidence in one's own ability to act as well as new courage to actively engage in a renewal of democratic practice. Abstract systems such as politics, participation, democracy, society were experienced by the participants as more manageable, accessible and lively in the course of the group process (see Chapter 4.2 Evaluation SenseMaker, Part II Before and after comparisons).

This observation is complemented by the insights from the focus groups and the participatory observation. A comparative analysis of the focus groups shows that participants tended to describe numerous additional qualities and competencies as important for dealing democratically with multiple crises after the large group process. In addition to the social structures and institutions previously named as

important, as well as the ability to communicate with each other with respect for diversity and differences in opinion, the competencies of forming relationships with oneself and others as well as dialogical communication are increasingly named (see Chapter 4.1 Evaluation of participatory observation and focus groups).

Furthermore, the participatory observations allow the reasoned assessment that topics previously experienced as "frozen", difficult or highly emotional became more accessible and workable in the group process. The process seems to enable many participants to be in deeper resonance with their own experience and the experience of others with regard to massive crises and past traumatic experiences. Thus, the insights from focus groups and participant observation support the results of the SenseMaker-analysis.

Furthermore, the following trends can be identified at the interface of collective trauma dynamics, democracy and polarization. The overall picture that emerges justifies the impression that the trauma-informed large group process can counteract polarization tendencies (see Chapter 5.2 for a detailed presentation of the trends).

**Trend 1**: Within the group process, a more conscious perception and a new understanding of the manifold links between personal injuries, collective memory contents and present crises experiences emerge.

**Trend 2:** Within the large group process, the participants' sense-making and meaning-making change in such a way that they express more commitment, motivation and responsibility in the context of democracy.

**Trend 3:** Participants experience themselves as having a powerful voice and effect when the polyphony of democracy is not experienced purely cognitively, but emo-

tionally and in an embodied way. Democracy then transforms from a "thing out there" into an internalized resonance experience.

**Trend 4**: The lived experience of resonance enables a dynamic and connected approach to polarization and conflict. Differences and differing opinions can be better included and contained from which new, related and appropriate response possibilities arise.

Overall, the results of the research indicate that new formats of democratic practice are necessary in order to sustainably counter the effects of multiple and dynamic crises. The stresses and uncertainties to which citizens are exposed in the face of crises require social spaces in which communicative sense-making and understanding can take place. The trauma-informed large group process and the use of the SenseMaker represent a promising possibility to make the voices of citizens audible and representable. This can help to strengthen the societal dialogue and to overcome or at least mitigate polarization through the joint creation of meaning. They point to the possibility of a new kind of politics and a new quality of democracy. Going beyond the process analyzed, subsequent conclusions can be drawn (see Chapter 5.3 Outlook):

1. Feelings of division and experiences of separation among citizens should be actively addressed, both individually and socially, in order to strengthen political and social trust, social cohesion and the willingness to play a part in shaping society.

2. A trauma-sensitive perspective offers the possibility to become more aware of deeper personal and collective dynamics and intergenerational aspects in democratic processes of understanding and to increase the relatedness and compassion of those involved.

3. In order to meet the need for opportunities for participation and greater responsiveness, accessible social spaces are needed in which people can come closer to each other through "relationship work" and democracy can be experienced in a concrete and living way.

4. The trauma-informed large group process and the use of the SenseMaker is a promising way to make diversity mappable and tangible and to enable a shared creation of meaning. The ability to engage in societal dialogue, including on critical issues, is increased and polarization can be overcome or at least mitigated.

5. A model-like implementation of trauma-informed processes on different political levels (such as the municipal level or in connection with instruments of deliberative and direct democracy) is a central next step in order to explore societal discourses on specific, politically sensitive topics and to work on them together with citizens.

6. Systematic research into (semi-)public trauma-informed processes, their impact and context-dependency is further necessary in order to better understand them within the scope of democractic work and to apply them in practice in a goal-oriented manner.

Ultimately, further strengthening the ability to resonate and the willingness to responsibly confront present and future crises is indispensable for the future of a vibrant democracy. This not only applies to all members of a democratic society, but is also a continuous practice and outcome of joint efforts of those who constitute such societies.
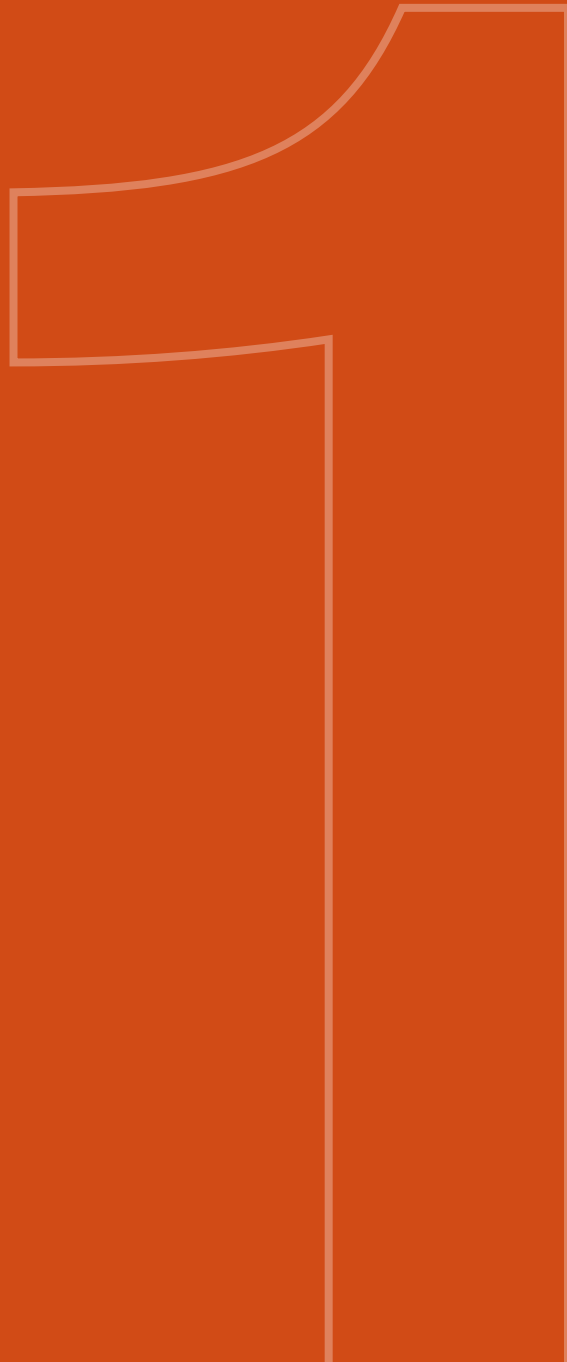
# Contents

# Introduction

# 1 Introduction

Corona crisis, climate crisis, ecolocigal crisis, now the war in Ukraine: we live in times of multiple, pervasive and interconnected crises. These multiple crises challenge our democracies to provide orientation and to take appropriate measures together. In this situation, it is also important to recognize hidden forces at play in our society. This report is based on the assumption that invisible wounds of the past are activated in crises, thus contributing to a deepening of social fragmentation and polarization. These wounds or traumas act simultaneously on an individual, intergenerational and collective level (see Annex: Approaches to the term "collective trauma"). In order to explore the question to which extent a trauma-informed approach can be applied in the context of democracy work, Pocket Project e.V. and Mehr Demokratie e.V. jointly initiated a large group process led by Thomas Hübl. The aim was to support and deepen mutual perception and understanding across social divides. We were guided by the following research question:

**Can understanding and dealing more consciously with collective trauma dynamics help strengthen our democracy and overcome polarization?**

The trauma-informed large group process was developed by Thomas Hübl and is regularly used in the work of the Pocket Project. It was researched using the "SenseMaker" approach, focus groups and participatory observation. The present initative has received academic support from the Institute for Integral Studies (IFIS) as part of the EU Leadership for Transition (LiFT) Politics project, the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) and the Cynefin Centre. The research is also part of Adrian Wagner's doctoral thesis at the University of Witten/Herdecke.

The prehistory of the project is presented in Chapter 2, which also details the theoretical framework of the research and explains how complexity research, the concept of collective trauma, democracy and sensemaking were combined into a coherent theoretical foundation. In Chapter 3, we explain both the design of the large group process and the methods and instruments used to research it.

In Chapter 4 we present the results of our evaluations. In addition to the findings from the focus groups and participatory observation, this chapter focuses on the analysis of the SenseMaker data. Chapter 5 then provides a concluding discussion, in which we formulate preliminary observations, trends and outlooks based on the data analysis.

# Trauma and democracy — a research project

# 2 Trauma and democracy — a research project

## 2.1 Prehistory

The increasing polarization in the context of the Corona pandemic impelled us to examine social dynamics of division and political dissatisfaction more closely in a trauma-sensitive large group process. In the summer of 2021, a first project team consisting of Pocket Project and Mehr Demokratie staff was formed. After the war in Ukraine began, we decided to broaden the focus of the event beyond the context of the Corona crisis. The questioning shifted to considerations of the extent to which trauma as a phenomenon needs to be taken more into account in the management of multiple and complex crises, including climate change, war, the pandemic, and more. In addition, the event offered the opportunity to test the format of the guided, trauma-informed large group process as a new participation instrument, with the aim of facilitating a deeper understanding of democracy and trauma. How significantly life stories can be shaped by traumatic experiences – especially in the context of war and violence – is shown by the experience gained over a decade with large group processes led by Thomas Hübl.

The group processes and trainings conducted by Thomas Hübl in Germany since the turn of the millennium initially strongly focused on personal and spiritual development. Here, participants repeatedly came into contact with events and experiences related to the Holocaust and World War II. The practical exploration of the collectively traumatizing effect of historical events and their processing has therefore become increasingly important in Thomas Hübl´s work in recent years. Since 2016, the Pocket Project has provided an institutional framework for the approach of a trauma-informed large group process (the so-called Collective Trauma Integration Process) developed from practical experience. A central goal of the Pocket Project is to investigate the method of the trauma-informed large group process and to apply it in various areas of society. The cooperation between the Pocket Project and Mehr Demokratie attempts to integrate trauma-sensitive communication into democratic negotiation processes. We were able to win the Institute for Integral Studies (IFIS)[1], the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS)[2] and the Cynefin Center[3], Hub for Action Research and Development, as project partners for the scientific support of the project.

## 2.2 Theoretical foundations

The study of trauma and large group processes is challenging in that it cannot be undertaken by a single scientific discipline alone. Both group dynamic processes and "trauma" are extremely complex phenomena. Large groups are characterized by a multitude of dynamic interactions among participants, both conscious and unconscious. In turn, the psychological concept of trauma is strongly influenced in its development and application by historical-social, political and cultural contexts and interests (Kühner 2008). At the same time, no unified understanding of collective trauma has been established to date. The theoretical framework of this study therefore comprises approaches from political science, sociology, psychology and trauma research, which will be explained below. In order to link the different theoretical approaches, we relate them to the central process of "sensemaking" in the personal and collective handling of complex crisis situations. The sensemaking perspective also allows for a subsequent understanding of the role and impact of collective trauma in the context of democracies. Finally, we discuss the phenomenon of resonance as a basis for trauma-sensitive participation and of assuming responsibility in democratic societies.

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1   https://www.ifis-freiburg.de/ueber-das-institut
2   https://www.iass-potsdam.de/de
3   https://thecynefin.co

**I. Sensemaking as a response to complexity**
In order to do justice to the complexity and dynamics of the trauma-informed large group process, we were guided by the characterization of social systems developed by Snowden, a complexity researcher (Snowden & Bonne 2007). Snowden defines different states of social systems (from simple to complicated to complex and chaotic) and identifies key dynamics of orientation and decision-making.

In distinction to complicated contexts, complex environments require more interaction and more intense communication, according to Snowden. While in complex systems there can be a multitude of unknowns, no obviously correct answers and many competing ideas, the sensemaking of the participants plays a central role. Shared patterns of orientation can also be identified here.

Sensemaking can generally be described as a process that enables us to meaningfully organize the multiple sensory impressions in our stream of experience in order to retrospectively communicate them as a (more or less) structured narrative. To deal with complex environmental situations, individuals, groups and organizations continuously create contexts of meaning.

Jones (2015) describes five different schools of sensemaking in "Sensemaking Methodology: A Liberation Theory of Communicative Agency"[4]. Relevant to our research is sensemaking according to Weick and Snowden. According to Weick, sensemaking should be understood as the quintessence of human thought and action. In this context, language as a medium is of central importance. For Weick, language is action: *"People, as soon as they speak, create [something]"* (Wetzel 2005, p. 182, own translation). The author describes the creation of meaning as a highly dynamic, non-linear and social process that takes place in the interplay between percep-

tion, action and experience (Weick 1995). This process is partly unconscious. Meaning-making is characterized by the fact that it *"1) is anchored in the construction of one's own identity, 2) is retrospective, 3) interacts with a reacting environment, 4) must always be considered socially, 5) represents an ongoing process, 6) takes in and considers information only to a limited extent, and 7) is driven not by accuracy but by plausibility"* (Weick 1995, p. 17).

According to Jones, Snowden's sensemaking approach is defined as follows: *"Snowden's more evolutionary model views sensemaking as a knowledge production activity in which data are used to create a shared understanding of problem domains [...]"* (Jones 2015). This pragmatic approach is based on narrative research and complexity science, among others, and is also often understood as "distributed ethnography". Here, using the SenseMaker software, large volumes of personal statements, observations and short stories ("micro-stories"[5]) are collected in real time. Subsequently, the collected statements can be evaluated by the authors themselves as well as scientifically processed. In the methods section (Chapter 3) we describe the background of SenseMaker and the methodology of distributed ethnography in more detail.

**Sensemaking in the context of political consulting**
Sensemaking is playing an increasingly important role in the field of political consulting. Due to the complex interaction of different social actors, institutions and social systems, there is an increasing need for spaces in politics in which people can learn to understand and navigate complexity. Simple, mechanistic ways of thinking often contribute less to solving complex problems than to exacerbate them. Here, policymakers are challenged to redefine their relationship with scientific political consulting in order to address complex challenges (Schenuit, 2017).

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4   https://www.epicpeople.org/sensemaking-methodology/

5   In the following, the terms "story", "micro-story" and "narrative" are used synonymously.

Schenuit argues in his analysis "Between fact- and sense-making: the importance of scientific expertise in the political decision-making process"[6], that through the co-production of science and politics a shift from pure fact-making to sense-making is taking place. Here he draws heavily on the research of Jasanoff, in which the latter describes sensemaking as a process of co-production of a) *"making identity"*, b) *"making institutions"*, c) *"making discourses"* and d) *"making representations"* (Jasanoff 2004, p. 276). Schenuit argues that *"experts should not aim their actions at fact-making alone, but should also pay more attention to the dimensions of sense-making if they want to be politically relevant. In a more polarized society, scientific expertise only acquires relevance in political decision-making processes if it is more strongly related to the social production of identities, institutions, discourses and representations"* (Schenuit 2017, pp. 7–10, own translation).

Other voices also argue that political consulting is required to develop new formats and communication strategies beyond the factual orientation. The sensemaking process tested in this project with regard to democracy and trauma could be a possible strategy.

**Sensemaking and trauma**
Both trauma research and clinical practice show that people whose lives have been shaken by traumatic events are intensely concerned with making sense of and reconstructing their identity (Reddemann, Luise & Sachsse 1997). In particular, survivors of man-made violence are challenged to redefine fundamental ideas about themselves and the world. Trust in fellow human beings, society or even life as such can often be permanently disturbed (Hermann 1994). For the processing of

the traumatic experience the act of sharing as well as the creation of a coherent, meaningful narrative is essential (Kühner 2008). It is in the relational space, in contact with others, that the ruptures in the personal story as well as in the social fabric can be recovered. Van de Ven's research emphasizes the great importance of sharing, exchanging and reflecting together for a new identity construction and meaning-making in the context of traumatic life experiences (van de Ven 2020). His qualitative research on sensemaking in peer counselling settings (support of affected people by affected people) highlights the importance of co-creating shared stories of survival and regeneration (van de Ven 2020). At the same time, he points to the lack of research and empirical data on social processes of meaning-making in groups when dealing with trauma. This research project, accompanying a trauma-informed large group process, can therefore be seen as an important next step to provide new knowledge in the field of sensemaking and identity construction in the context of society and democracy.

**II. "Collective trauma" and historical meaning-making**
Trauma (from the Greek, meaning "wound") can be understood as a "mental injury". The German Trauma Foundation defines trauma as *"a stressful event or situation that cannot be coped with and processed by the person concerned. […] Traumatizing experiences are generally defined as stressful events such as severe accidents, illnesses and natural disasters, but also experiences of significant psychological, physical and sexual violence as well as severe experiences of loss and neglect"* (https://www.deutsche-traumastiftung.de/traumata, own translation). The central characteristic of traumatization is the experience of being overwhelmed and powerless in the face of physical and/or psychological violence. Another characteristic of traumatization is that the trauma is experienced again and again in the form of unwanted memories, flashbacks or nightmares. Situations or bodily sensations that are similar to the trauma ("triggers") can provoke a re-experiencing of the trauma (van der Kolk, Fisler 1995).

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6   https://regierungsforschung.de/zwischen-fact-und-sense-making-die-bedeutung-wissenschaftlicher-expertise-im-politischen-entscheidungsprozess-impulse-fuer-die-politikwissenschaft-aus-den-science-and-technology-studies (own translation)

As a concept, "trauma" has undergone constant and controversial development over the last century in the cultural sciences, the humanities and medicine. With the inclusion of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the third edition of the American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the concept of trauma has gained widespread scientific and public acceptance and has become increasingly popular over the last three decades (Koch 2015).

Against this background, it is not surprising that the debate about the concept of collective traumatization is also controversial and touches on different academic disciplines. The term "collective trauma" initially appears to be a coherent description for phenomena related to slavery, war, colonization or genocide. However, closer examination reveals how difficult and indeterminate the term is. Psychological, sociological, political science, or historical and cultural studies perspectives each shed different light on the phenomenon of collective traumatization. A selection of different explanations of the term "collective trauma" is intended to illustrate this complexity and can be found in the Annex.

In her work "Collective Trauma – Assumptions, Arguments, Concepts"[7], Kühner argues that one can approach the construct of collective trauma in two ways: either one goes from the individual to the collective, starting from the concept of trauma in psychology and the phenomenology of individual traumas. Or one chooses the path starting from the collective by *"looking in different disciplines [for] what they each have to say about trauma-related collective phenomena (such as identity or memory)"* (Kühner 2008, p. 17, own translation). Both approaches tend to overlook each other's perspectives and run the risk of overemphasizing their own. Kühner argues that *"[...] over- or under-emphasizing psychological processes is a common tendency of addressing 'trauma for the collective identity'"* (Kühner 2008, p. 28,

own translation). Thus, while the psychological perspective often risks projecting individual trauma dynamics onto entire societies and/or cultures without taking into account the complex interactions of systems and subsystems, cultural and sociological perspectives risk undermining, diluting, and politically instrumentalizing the concept of trauma through an inflationary use of the term. Kühner therefore finds it promising to examine the concept of collective memory in the context of trauma and narration.

Building on Halbwachs' concept of collective memory, cultural scientists Aleida and Jan Assmann distinguish between two types of memory: communicative and cultural memory. Communicative memory is formed through everyday and informal communication with other individuals. Aleida and Jan Assmann also refer to it as "everyday memory" (Assmann 1992, own translation). Communicative memory includes memories that relate to the recent past, going back at most three to four generations, or about 80 to 100 years. *"It is these memories that man shares with his contemporaries. The typical case is generational memory. [...] It emerges in time and passes with it, or more precisely: with its bearers"* (Assmann 1992, p. 50, own translation). For instance, the Second World War, which can still be remembered, at least currently, by contemporary witnesses and survivors. Cultural memory, by contrast, consists of "coagulated forms", such as myths and memory figures in the history of a collective; it goes back further than the three to four generations of the communicative memory. In cultural memory, history and myth are intermingled. The Exodus from Egypt and the migration of the Hebrew people through the desert can be cited as examples; or, for Germany, the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest or the 30-Year War.

The fact that history and the past are not simply "behind us" but are constantly being reconstructed by people, is made clear by Straub's psychological theory of historical meaning-making (Straub 1998). According to this theory, historical constructions of time *"bring collective experiences and expectations into a tem-*

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7   https://d-nb.info/1077105673/34 (own translation)

*poral context, whereby the social past, present, and future of groups, communities, societies, or cultures are linked in a more or less complex way*" (Kölbl & Straub 2003, p. 77, own translation). Accordingly, history can be understood as a symbolic construct that is actively generated by people through communication. In this context, past, present and future behave as a "complex, dynamic set of relations": "*What has happened has happened irrevocably, certainly. But what has happened and how we identify former events as something specific and qualify, describe and explain them as components of the past and history is never certain once and for all*" (Kölbl & Straub 2003, p. 78, own translation). Historical constructions of time do not proceeded completely consciously: "*The most striking example of the latent power of history and the past as a former event is offered by those traumas that stem from experiences of collective violence. Such experiences are known to be frequently excluded from public and individual consciousness*" (Kölbl & Straub 2003, p. 78, own translation). According to Straub, historical constructions of time serve as attempts to derive a coherent narrative from collective expectations, experiences and changes (Straub 1998). In this respect, the narrative is of central importance in the process of historical meaning-making.

**Narration as a key concept**
"*Narrative: a narrative or account used to explain or justify a society or historical period*" (Oxford English Dictionary).

"*Narratives are rich in imagery, vivid, emotionally gripping, and comprehensible in the inner connections of the sequence of events. For this purpose, available information is retrieved from autobiographical memory*" (Maerker 2009, p. 302, own translation).

Even children structure what they experience into narratives and are taught experiences by their parents in the form of coherent narratives. Thus, the world "*does not appear as a steady flow without meaning, but always already as meaningfully organized, as a world of named or nameable things and as a purposefully unfolding*

*process in time*" (Polkinghorne 1998, p. 17, own translation). In narrative psychology, it has been demonstrated that certain processes and patterns of such narrative construction determine whether a narrative is accepted as true and authentic. Not the veracity, but the social acceptance of the narrative is of central importance – a phenomenon described by Polkinghorne as the "sense of objectivity" (Polkinghorne 1998, p. 184, own translation). Kühner argues that the social acceptance of narratives not only applies to individual remembering, but also to the various forms of social or collective remembering. "*Small or larger communities of rememberance negotiate 'narratives' in the context of social interactions, which are perceived as collectively relevant by the various members of the communities of rememberance*" (Kühner 2008, p. 246, own translation).

Similar to the shift from "fact-making" to "sense-making" in the field of politics, this can also be noted for history in general and for collective memory in particular: It is not the exclusive facts but the social acceptance of narratives that is central to historical sense-making. In this regard, Kühner assumes that the "*standardization or collectivization of memory [is] a normal rather than an unusual process*" (Kühner 2008, p. 249, own translation). Collective trauma is different. This is "*an event that could not be retrospectively processed with the 'normally accustomed' collective memory practices*" (Kühner 2008, p. 250) and "*thus [was] not transformed into a narrative accepted by all group members*" (Kühner 2008, p. 250, own translation). Subsequently, Kühner formulates two working definitions of collective trauma, which also provide orientation for us in the following:

**Working definition 1:** "*A 'collective trauma' can be defined as a traumatic event stored in collective memory*" (Kühner 2008, p. 250, own translation).

**Working definition 2:** "*A 'collective trauma' can be defined with the process criterion as an event that could not be retrospectively processed with the 'normally accustomed' collective memory practices*" (Kühner 2008, p. 250, own translation).

Crises, whether Corona, climate change or the war in Ukraine, can act as catalysts that make previous sensemaking impossible and activate old, unprocessed traumatic material stored in the collective memory and bring it back into the collective consciousness. For Kühner, the practice of remembering is crucial here. It aims less at a pure (fact-based) transmission of information, but requires witnessing of what could not/can not yet be expressed. The focus here is not on overcoming or recalling the events in a number- and fact-based manner, but on feeling the emotions that have been suppressed from public perception. Emotions such as disquiet, fear, mistrust and grief require space first and foremost in order to feel what actually happened, as in the example of the Holocaust (Kühner 2008, p. 153).

This assumption shows parallels with the clinical-psychological trauma perspective. Traumatic experiences are often (re)experienced as fragmented, fragile and incoherent. The breakdown of the meaningfulness of one's narrative is the rule rather than the exception. Psychiatrist and trauma researcher van der Kolk writes that overwhelming experiences *"[bring] us to the edge of our comprehension and [make] it impossible for us to express through linguistic means what moves us"* (van der Kolk 2018, p. 58, own translation). According to van der Kolk, narratives provide a realm in which overwhelming experience can be expressed. It is precisely where narratives have gaps, fractures and inconsistencies that individual and collective sense-making is often incoherent, which, if left unaddressed, can escalate into tangible crises.

### III. Resonance, democracy and trauma

Thomas Hübl's work with individuals and groups fosters subtle awareness of the dynamics of memory processes in their interconnection with subjective-somatic experiences and collective memories. Along with the guiding question of how unconscious (often transgenerational) contents of the collective memory can be reconnected and related, he developed the format of a trauma-informed large group process. Central to this work is the restoration of the experience of resonance, through the conscious awareness of contents of the collective memory that were previously perceived as too painful or threatening and therefore repressed.

The concept of resonance can be found within the sociology of Hartmut Rosa. His "Sociology of World Relationship" makes an important contribution to bringing together resonance, democracy and trauma (Rosa, 2016, own translation). Resonance capacity allows us to bring into connection and relationship even that which is fragmented in collective memory, including fractures and inconsistencies. The ability to resonate is based on the openness to jointly include contradictory and challenging contexts of meaning and to not suppress them. A resonating counterpart makes it possible that even unconscious contents and experiences are perceived and made addressable.

Scheub defines resonance in her book "Democracy – the unfinished"[8], which was written in the context of the work of Mehr Demokratie e. V., as follows: *"'Resonare' comes from Latin and literally means 'to ring back', 'to sound back'. According to the etymological dictionary, the word 'resonance' stands for 'reverberation', 'repercussion', 'sound amplification', 'appeal', 'understanding', 'interest', and 'effect'. We humans have an existential need for response, resonance and co-impact. If we no longer experience resonance, the world is dead to us. Are we ourselves like dead. In his book 'Resonance', the sociologist Hartmut Rosa puts forward the thesis that this is the key concept for a successful relationship to the world and the opposite concept to alienation. A non-alienated living world is a resonant world that resonates within us and with us, that offers many answers, possibilities for self-determination and co-determination. Responses that sound back within us come from*

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8   https://www.mehr-demokratie.de/fileadmin/pdf/2017-06-15_Demokratie_Die_Unvollendete.pdf (own translation)

*other people, but also from experiences of nature, from artistic, craft or spiritual experiences or other sources"* (Scheub 2017, p. 9-10, own translation).

Rosa illustrates, among other things, how societal problems cannot be managed solely through economic and political reforms, but require a *"transformation of our relations with the world"* (Rosa 2016, 76-78, own translation). Scheub describes this as follows: *"Hartmut Rosa, the social philosopher from Jena, sees politics as a 'sphere of resonance. [Here,] democracy makes the world of public institutions and the structures of social life speak.' Modern democracy, he writes further, rests on the notion that it 'gives voice to each individual and makes them audible, so that the politically shaped world becomes an expression of their polyphony.' Resonance, Rosa says, does not mean unison or harmony, but response, movement, touch, resounding contradiction"* (Scheub 2017, pp. 9-10, own translation).

For Rosa, resonance is not merely an emotional state, but a bodily, spiritual and worldly mode of relating. Resonance is where subject and world touch and transform each other. Democracy is therefore, according to Rosa, an instrument of modernity to "make society resonant" – at least in theory. Disenchantment with politics can then be understood as an expression of the "falling silent" of politics (Rosa 2016). Rosa sees, among others, the burnout phenomenon and climate change as "resonance pathologies" of modern society, as the collective inner space of society increasingly dwindles due to societal acceleration and rationalization (Rosa 2016, pp. 76-79). Resonance is characterized by curiosity and engagement, social co-creation, and flow states. It is associated with the experience of self-efficacy. Trauma, on the other hand, as mentioned earlier, prevents or blocks the possibility of relating to the world, of being able to resonate with oneself, with others, and with the world at large. The extent to which participants experience resonance as citizens intimes of crisis may allow conclusions to be drawn about the activation, repression or even integration of collective traumatic experiences.

We therefore asked the participants of the group process to write down their experience of the current crises as citizens in the context of German democracy in the form of stories, and to evaluate them independently. This gives us the opportunity to explore the narrative landscapes between different poles (resonance, alienation, traumatization, etc.) in their complexity and to trace the development of these landscapes through the group process. By asking the participates to evaluate the stories themselves, we are able to analyze initial evidence of flow states, self-efficacy and co-creative design within the stories. In the next chapter, we describe in detail the trauma-informed group process and research design including the methods and instruments used, with a particular focus on the SenseMaker.
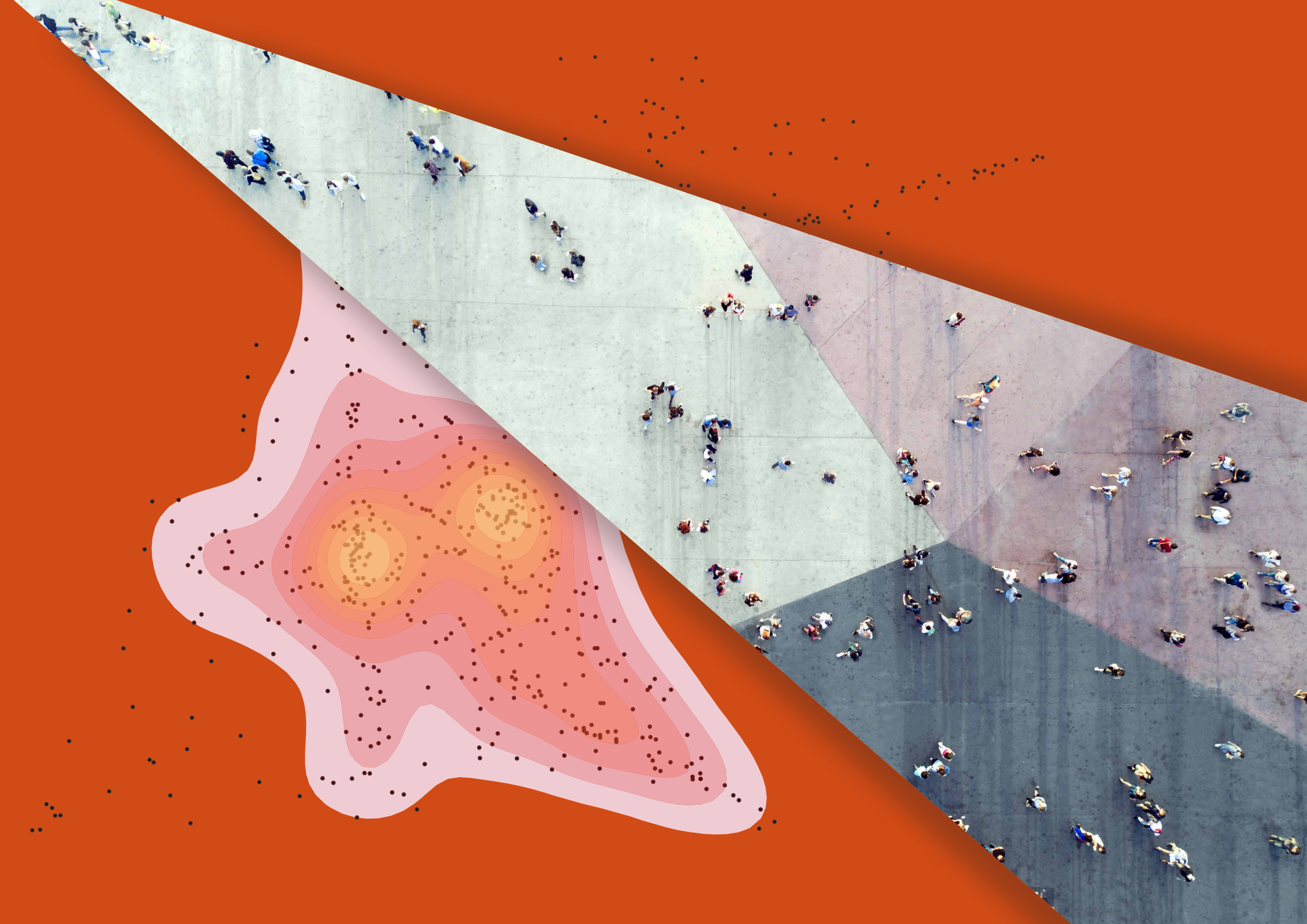
# Methodological approach

# 3  Methodological approach

## 3.1  Research approach

In order to do justice to the complexity of the focus of investigation, we chose a predominantly qualitative-interpretative and explorative research approach. The collection and interpretation of stories by the participants themselves, and thus the process of meaning-making and sensemaking, were foregrounded. This allows for a deeper understanding of the role of sensemaking and meaning-making in the large group process within the context of multiple crises, social polarization, traumatizing events and democratic societies. In the context of democratic processes and their research, this perspective remains rare and no established and widely applied theories and methods exist. Accordingly, our aim is not so much to provide empirically validated evidence of specific causal relationships, but rather to deepen our understanding of the intersections of sensemaking, crises and polarization, as well as collective trauma. We aim to map connections and trends as contributions to structure this still poorly systematized field of research.

Therefore, we chose the SenseMaker software by Cognitive Edge (hereafter: SenseMaker) as our data collection tool: an innovative instrument that has been tested in particular in the context of complex systems research (von der Merwe et al. 2019; Wamsler et al. 2022). The SenseMaker was complemented through use of participatory observation, a method originating from ethnographic field research (Flick 2018) and particularly suitable for observing and documenting narratives in the multi-layered dynamics of the large group process. Participatory observation also allowed us to map the progression of the group process with a focus on process qualities, providing a complementary perspective on the dynamics of the process. Focus groups before and after the large group process gave us another valuable source of data. Since focus groups aim at exchange and discussion among participants, they can capture shared orientations and constructions of meaning as well as intra-group negotiation and decision-making  processes (Flick 2018). The latter was particularly relevant for us given the democracy-related research question.

Participatory observation and focus groups represent complementary perspectives to the use of SenseMaker in the sense of method triangulation, i.e. the complementary application of different methods to study the same research object (Flick 2018).

The data analysis (Chapter 4) combines a quantitative overview of the totality of stories and evaluations based on the SenseMaker and the qualitative-interpretative analysis of these narratives in detail. Transcripts of the observations as well as the focus groups were summarized and analyzed in terms of emerging patterns. In Chapter 5, the insights from the different analyses are related to each other: insights into the sensemaking of the participants and respective changes in the course of the process, into process dynamics and observed qualities as well as insights into democratic competences valued by the participants. This enables a complementary picture of the large group process.

More detailed information on data collection and analysis can be found in Chapter 3.4 Survey instruments and Chapter 4 Results.

## 3.2  Event design

The large group process took place as an online event from 28 April 2022 to 1 May 2022 (3 full days in total). In the run-up to the event, the January issue of "Demokratie" (2022), the magazine of Mehr Demokratie e. V., provided information about the project and the event[9]. At the end of February 2022, the Pocket Project and Mehr Demokratie invited people to participate in the event on their websites, via social media and email distribution lists. In addition, people interested

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9   Democracy Research: Overcoming Polarization in Crises, Invitation to Joint Research. In: Democracy: Magazine for Participation and Direct Democracy. Issue 01.22, p. 27–28 (own translation)

in participation were invited to a free pre-call – an online conversation between Thomas Hübl and Claudine Nierth, the board spokesperson of Mehr Demokratie. Here, information was provided on the format and goal of the event as well as on the accompanying research of the large group process using the SenseMaker. 1200 people took part in the free pre-call on 11 April 2022.

Registration for the event took place via the Pocket Project e. V. website. Participation in the process was subject to a fee, with the proceeds used to cover the costs of the event. Any surpluses will be used for the future engagement of Pocket Project e. V. The registration required consenting to the privacy policy as well as to a health declaration, and also asked about the willingness to participate in the two workshops (the focus groups) preceding and following the large group process.

The large group process was led by Thomas Hübl; with democracy-related content elements being led by Claudine Nierth and Roman Huber from Mehr Demokratie. The 355 participants received an invitation to the online event (with a zoom link). At the beginning of the event, participants were informed that audio and video recordings would be used for research purposes only and would not be made available to the public. They were also informed that a number of observers would be monitoring the group process. In order to adequately support the participants in processing possible stressors, a team of 20 process facilitators was available, who have been familiar with trauma-informed large group processes for many years and have professional experience in the field of psychotherapy, supervision and coaching. In order to make access to support as easy as possible, a Zoom breakout room was set up that was accessible at all times and manned by a process facilitator. Participants who requested support through this were then assigned to separate breakout rooms for one-to-one conversations.
A technical team was at hand to ensure the smooth running of the digital event on Zoom, to record video and audio, and to assist with the use of the SenseMaker.

### 3.3  The trauma-informed large group process

The facilitation and design of large group processes have become increasingly important in recent years. The trauma-informed large group process (the so called Collective Trauma Integration Process), led by Thomas Hübl, Ph.D., was developed over two decades. In his efforts to apply mystical knowledge from the Christian, Judaic and Taoist traditions to a holistic model of development, Thomas Hübl has in recent years increasingly incorporated trauma-theoretical aspects into the conception and implementation of the groups. The group process makes use of various meditative, dialogical as well as practice-related group perception methods. The focus is on the conscious perception of personal emotional, cognitive and physical processes, as well as the conscious perception of the relationship to others and to the group as a whole. An important learning moment for the participants is the establishment and practice of a "meta-communication", i.e., a communication in the here and now about the ongoing events, through which unconscious contents and dynamics are often jointly reflected. The process of witnessing, in the sense of recognizing and acknowledging personal or collective realities, is another core element of Thomas Hübl's work. Thomas Hübl outlines the theoretical framework of his work in his book Healing Collective Trauma (Hübl 2021). However, scientific-empirical research into the trauma-informed large group approach has so far taken a back seat to its claim to be practically effective. An exception is the methodological and conceptual work of Matoba (Matoba 2021). The definite mechanisms of action and cause-effect relationships of the approach, however, have hardly been empirically researched yet.

Based on observations and conversations with Thomas Hübl, the Pocket Project describes six core phases of the large group process[10]. At the beginning, there is the development of a shared relational space, which allows access to previously uncon-

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scious or repressed traumatic experiences. On the basis of a trusting and safe space, there is the possibility of sharing personal traumatic experiences and having them witnessed by the group. Biographical, transgenerational and collective dimensions of traumatization are explored together. The effects of traumatization are experienced cognitively, emotionally and somatically and perceived in a differentiated way. Simultaneously adopting an observational perspective as well as connecting with witnessing others allows for a gradual integration of the traumatic experience. The outlined stages of the group process cannot be clearly separated from each other and do not proceed in a linear fashion, but rather in a circular way.

Below we provide an overview of the elements used in the trauma-informed large group process:

**Meditation and perception exercises**
Through different forms of meditation and perception exercises, participants experience a deepened self-reference and expand their own regulative abilities.

**Guided writing exercises**
Writing exercises on specific questions open up the possibility of thematic self-exploration and differentiation for the participants.

**Survey or sentiment poll**
Participants make short personal statements on a specific question. There is no discussion or commenting on the statements.

**Individual work in front of the large group**
Participants in the large group are offered the opportunity to work on personal issues with the group leader. Previously unconscious or undisclosed personal aspects can be more deeply understood and accepted through the experience of relatedness and witnessing. The conversation between participants and the group leader takes place in front of the group. Talking about and sharing personal traumatic experiences in an appreciative group space is essential to the restorative effect of the process. It also creates a learning opportunity for the witnessing group members.

**Discussions with experts and group leaders**
In discussions with experts, questions of content are discussed and reflected upon in the sense of a panel.

**Joint reflection rooms in small groups**
Small groups of 3–5 participants serve as "digestion rooms" in which the experiences made during the large group process are reflected upon together and brought into relationship.

These elements were repeatedly combined during the 3-day process, so that phases of meditation, writing exercises for the personal exploration of questions and issues, individual work with the facilitator, as well as reflection in small groups and deepening the content with experts were integrated (see Figure 1 in Chapter 4.1 for an overview of the process). In addition to the above-mentioned elements of the group process, there was the possibility to work on situations of high emotional stress or particularly challenging personal concerns in an individual session with a member of the team of process facilitators.

The research project was the first to use the SenseMaker tool in the context of the Pocket Project's work with large groups. Participants were able to enter and evaluate their stories in the SenseMaker software via mobile phone or computer before, during and after the large group process (see Chapter 3.4 below). This resulted in a further interweaving of direct experience and reflection and interpretation of the events by the participants in the form of stories. The participants' perceptions, positions and aspirations with regard to trauma and democracy, were thus continuously documented throughout the entire project.

## 3.4     Survey instruments

In the following chapter, we explain the survey instruments we applied. First, we present the SenseMaker software and its use in detail; then we describe participatory observation and focus groups as complementary methods.

**I. SenseMaker**
The SenseMaker by Cognitive Edge (hereafter: SenseMaker) enables the collection and interpretation of large amounts of micro-narratives, i.e. short stories of a few sentences. The stories are written, entered and evaluated by the participants of a research project. SenseMaker thus allows to capture the "what" and the "why" at the same time. The software helps to uncover general patterns and to address the unspoken in order to make sense of the complex, ambiguous and rapidly changing environment. SenseMaker focuses on people's voices and interpretations rather than interviewing experts. Patterns, ideas, outliers, trends, threats or opportunities are visualized by the software to facilitate intuitive access without the need for statistical knowledge. Since narratives play a central role within democracy and collective trauma research (see Chapter 2), SenseMaker was perfectly designed for our research project. In the following, the concrete functioning of the SenseMaker is briefly explained. Initially, the participants were invited to share a narrative as a personal response to a core question. Our prompting question was:

*"Imagine a close person asking about your experience as a citizen during this time. What personal experience would you tell?"*

After the participants had entered their answer to this question in the form of a micro-story via SenseMaker, they were invited to describe and evaluate their story in more detail. For this purpose, SenseMaker uses so-called triads – triangles that allow an evaluation of the narrative with regard to three selected dimensions. The dimensions were formulated with a broad reference to the theoretical background outlined above, in line with the exploratory research approach.
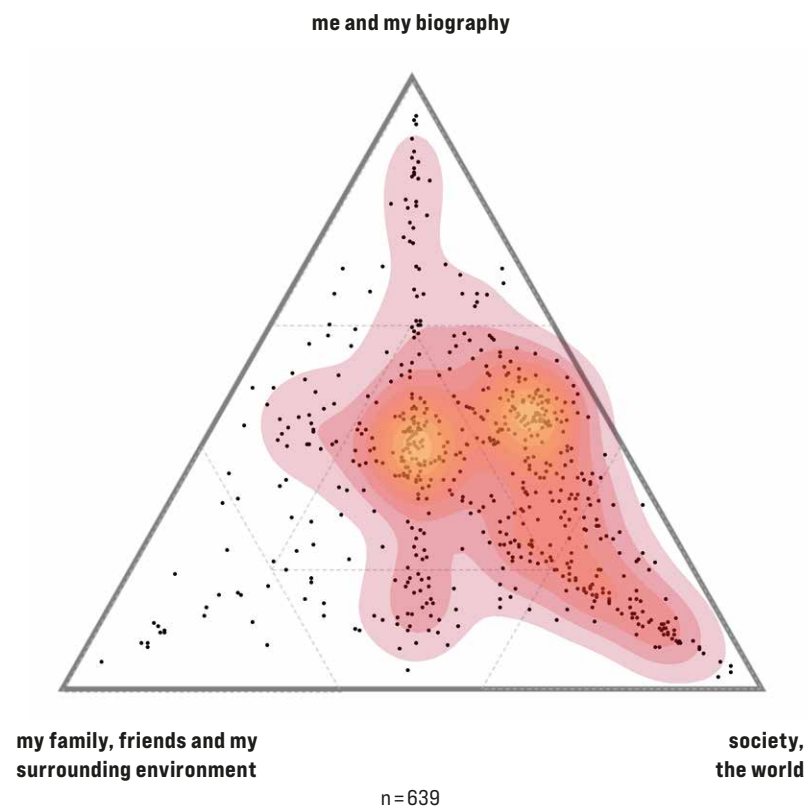
In the example triad below, participants were asked to consider how strongly their story relates to a) their individual biography, b) family and friends, or c) society. To do this, participants positioned a point in the triangle to indicate the degree of agreement with one dimension (e.g., 100% agreement with "me and my biography" is placed at the apex of the triangle). If two dimensions apply, the point is placed accordingly on the outer lines between the two reference points. An agreement to all three reference points corresponds to the center of the triangle. The degree of agreement can be indicated by the relative proximity to one of the respective corners of the triangle.

SenseMaker summarizes the totality of the answers to the various triads and displays them visually as a distribution of points. Each individual story is represented as a point in the triads. Each dot indicates how a specific story was rated with respect to the queried dimension. What does a triad like this show us? The totality of the stories entered gives a specific pattern for each triad, which is illustrated in the following graphs both as a distribution of points and as a heat map. In the triads, we recognize large clusters where many stories congregate, and smaller clusters where few to single stories are found. Both can provide valuable insights. Each triad is overlaid with an outline of its areas (dotted lines). The indication below the triad ("n") informs about the number of micro-stories entered in the triad.

**MY STORY RELATES TO ...**

In the following, we present triads selected for the research project and briefly explain the background of their dimensions.

me and my biography



my family, friends and my
surrounding environment

society,
the world

n = 639

25

The **triad "past – present – future"** reflects the temporal dimension in which the participants locate their stories. Based on our theoretical reflections on the formation of meaning within collective memory, the temporal location of individual stories is important. For example, the fact that stories cluster at the "past" pole or between the "past" and "present" poles might indicate that events of the past have a strong conscious or unconscious impact on the present, leaving fractures/fragmentations in collective sensemaking. This is in line with Kühner's working defini-tion of collective trauma, where events *"could not be processed with the accustomed practices of remembering"* (Kühner 2008, p. 250, own translation). Although no general statements can be made about collective trauma in Germany due to the limited number of participants, it might be interesting to see which stories are located on which time axes/poles.

The following three triads refer to trauma theoretical considerations and to Rosa's resonance theory and capture in which micro-stories the participants experience resonance to themselves, the situation and society.

**MY STORY RELATES TO …**

the past

the present                                    the future
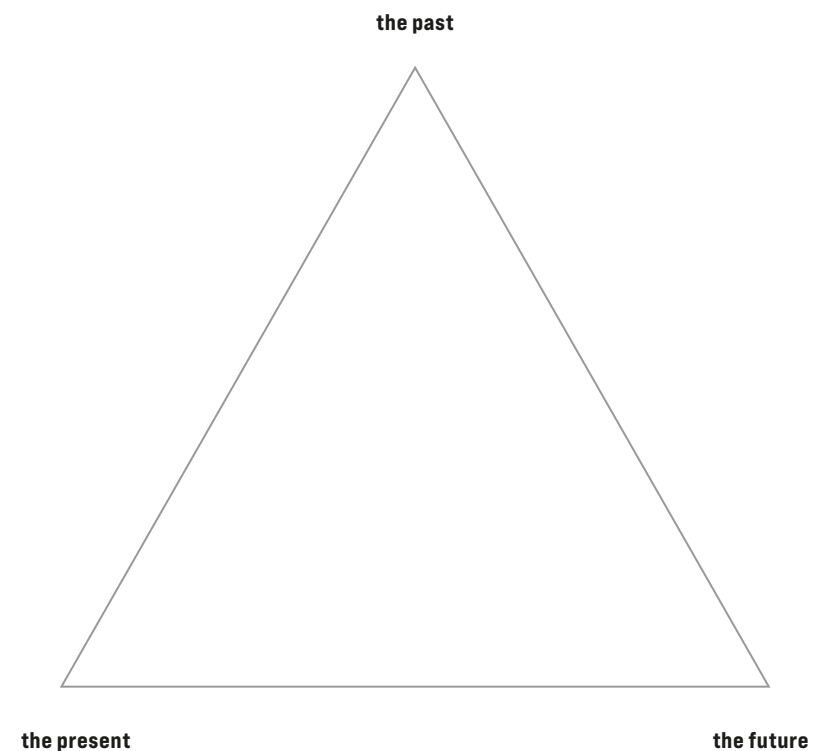
The triad **"'triggered', activated – numb, hopeless – engaged, curious"** refers to the ability of the human nervous system to adapt to changing environmental conditions. In situations of acute threat or prolonged (traumatic) stress, the nervous system resorts to three stress response patterns: fight, flight, or freeze (Goldstein & Kopin 2007). Emotional numbness and high nervous system activation equally serve as self-protection in the aftermath of traumatizing experience (van der Kolk 2018 ). Emotional numbness is also expressed by feeling detached from oneself and others. The term "triggered" indicates that the traumatic experience can be relived over and over again in the present, through stimuli that remind one of the original traumatic event. In the "'triggered', activated" or "numb, hopeless" mode of trauma and survival responses, the nervous system has little modulatory capacity to deal with unanticipated situations. The goal of the triad is to identify in which stories participants are experiencing themselves as engaged and curious, and when rigidity or high activation impedes an embodied, related and emergent response to environmental conditions. From practical experience in working with collective trauma integration, Thomas Hübl repeatedly describes states of numbness that protect us from unpleasant or traumatic experiences, as well as states of high, trauma-induced activation that often lead to chronic stress. Both states make it difficult to be openly in relation, be it with oneself, others or society (Rosa 2016).

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE MYSELF …**
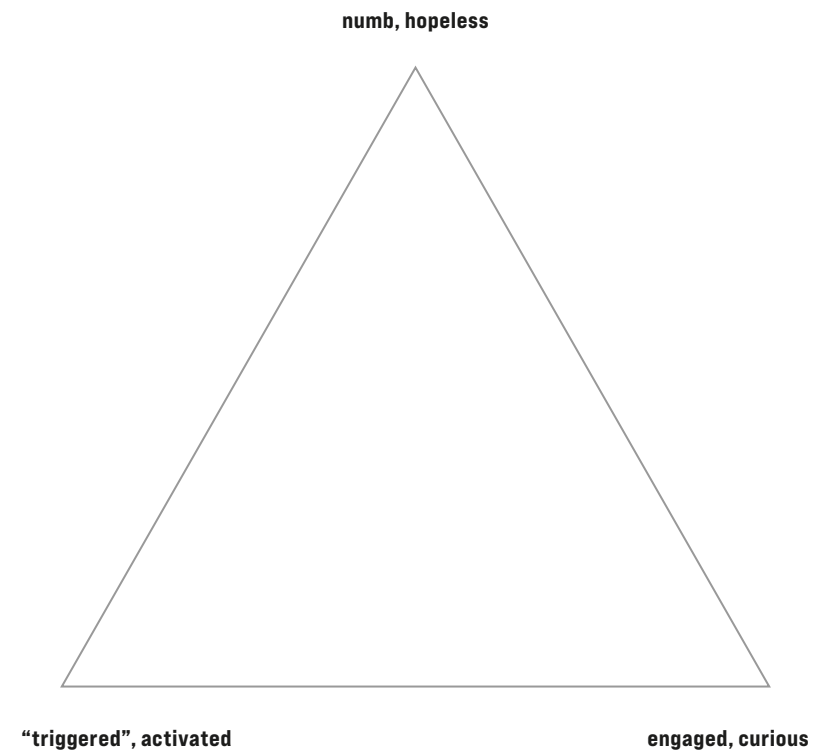


numb, hopeless

"triggered", activated

engaged, curious

The **triad "stuck, hardened – overwhelming, diffuse, confusing – in flux, moving, evolving"** describes the extent to which participants perceive a fluid, resonant relatedness in the democratic context within each story. In "Sociology of World Relationship" (Rosa 2016, own translation) Rosa mentions that many people perceive the democratic debate culture as either stuck and hardened in positions or feel overwhelmed, diffused, and confused by the complexity of information and opinions. Resonance, as mentioned earlier, represents a state of processual development and flow. Accordingly, this triad was included in the SenseMaker to trace the experience of resonance.

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE THE SITUATION AS ...**
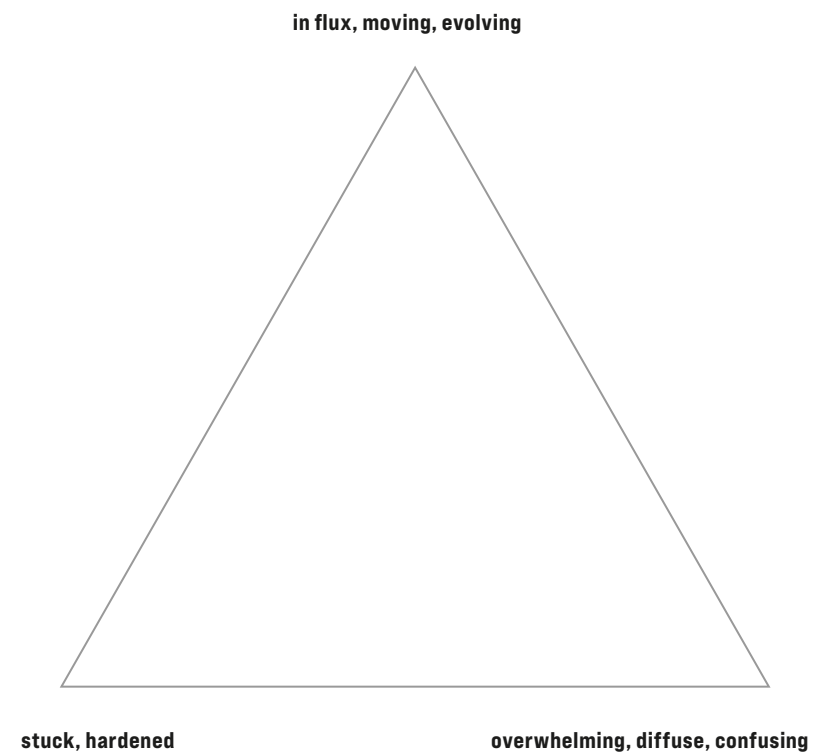
**in flux, moving, evolving**

**stuck, hardened**  **overwhelming, diffuse, confusing**

The **triad "fighting against structures – shaping society co-creatively – standing apart and feeling alienated"** aims at participants' perceived self-efficacy within social life. The participants were able to assess the extent to which they felt they had to fight against (democratic) institutions or felt alienated within the system. The ability to resonate is primarily characterized by the ability to co-create. Thomas Hübl speaks here of "response-ability", the ability to react appropriately to situations such as crises. The content of the stories may also allow conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which dealing with current political conflicts is influenced by unprocessed traumas on a personal and/or collective level.

**REFLECTING MY STORY, I EXPERIENCE MYSELF AS …**

co-creating society

fighting against existing
structures

standing apart and
feeling alienated

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE OTHERS AS ...**

count

0

| 0 | 25 | 50 | 75 | 100 |

**close by**                                    **far away**
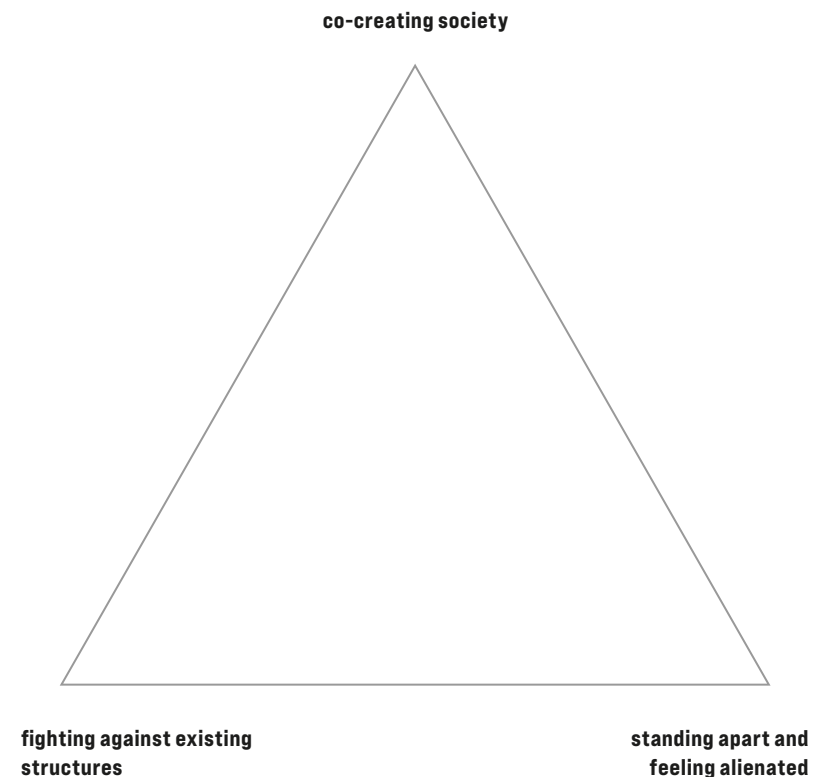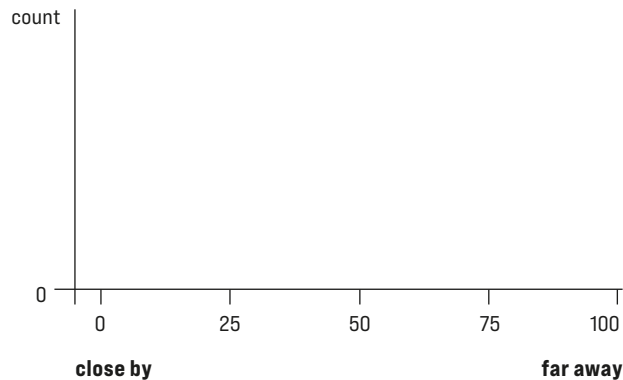
**IN MY STORY THERE IS AN INCREASE OF ...**
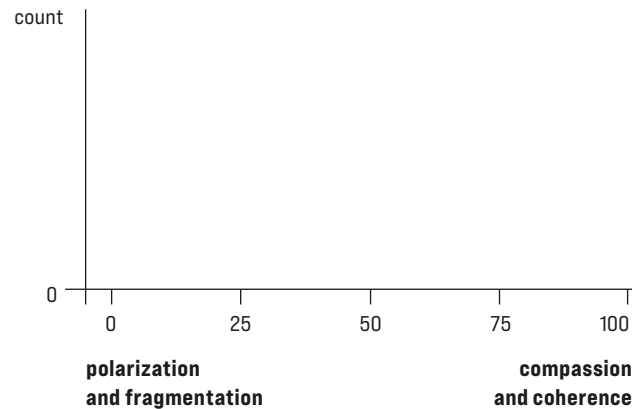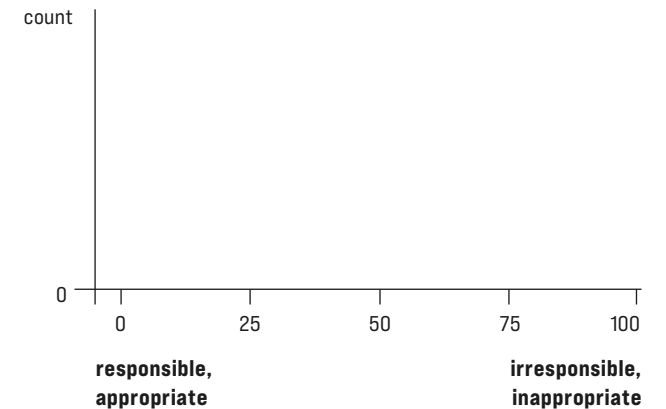
count

0

| 0 | 25 | 50 | 75 | 100 |

**polarization**                          **compassion**
**and fragmentation**                **and coherence**

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE SOCIETY'S RESPONSE AS ...**

count

0

| 0 | 25 | 50 | 75 | 100 |

**responsible,**                          **irresponsible,**
**appropriate**                            **inappropriate**

Dyads, as shown above, represent another way of evaluating narratives in SenseMaker. In dyads, the evaluation takes place in the area of tension between two concepts/poles. By placing a slider, the degree of agreement with the poles is signaled. The dyads used in the research project inquire about the degree of closeness to other people as well as the perception of society in terms of polarization/coherence. Furthermore, it should be assessed to what extend society's response to crises is experienced as appropriate and inappropriate.

A total of 643 micro-stories were entered into the SenseMaker. The stories were generated and evaluated by the participants in the workshop that preceded the group process, during the large group process and in the subsequent workshop (total period: 04/21/22–05/08/22).

**II. Participatory observation**

For the participatory observation, we used a pre-structured protocol in which the exact time, the description of what happened, the quality in the group/process quality, quotes and personal thoughts and comments of the observers could be entered for each selected point in time. The process qualities were developed jointly by members of the research team and Pocket Project staff who have differentiated knowledge of the large group process. A total of 9 qualities were defined: Resonance, Coherence, Integration, Numbness, High Activation, Polarization, (Strong) Emotions, Simultaneity of Past and Present, and Social Effectiveness. The qualities were developed from practical experience with the group process and partly included post-traumatic processing mechanisms described in psychotraumatology. This includes the altered experience of time when backward-looking memory and current experience become blurred (simultaneity of past and present). In compiling the qualities, we did not aim to generate conclusively defined units of analysis. Rather, we were interested in trying out and developing participatory observation in the context of the

trauma-informed large group process. We aimed at recording correspondences and deviations in the individual observations, and testing the possibilities of an intersubjectively comprehensible observation.

The 15 participant observers were familiar with the trauma-oriented large group process led by Thomas Hübl through their own previous participation. The well-founded argument that the observers thus were biased was countered by our assessment that people who were not familiar with the structure and content of the group process would be overwhelmed by the complexity and intensity of the events. In an online workshop, the observers were introduced to the use of the observation protocol and its categories and familiarized with the codes of process qualities. As a result of the joint process to reach a common understanding of the process qualities, their descriptions were adapted again. During the three-day group process, the research team invited observers to an online meeting once or twice a day in order to discuss the content-related and technical questions that arose during the observation as well as observers' sensitivities.

### III. Focus groups

The research design called for focus groups to be held before and after the large group process. The first focus groups took place on 4/21/2022 as part of a two-hour online workshop via Zoom. The workshop was facilitated by a member of the research team and had the following structure:

1. Participants were first asked to complete the SenseMaker.
2. In the 50 minutes hereafter, the following question was discussed in focus groups of 5 people each: "What are the most important five qualities/competencies we need to build a sustainable democracy in the face of the current crises?" The focus groups were instructed to then have two rounds of conversation around the question; in each round, each group member was to speak (at least) once. Lastly, the focus groups were instructed to document the five qualities or competencies they defined in an electronic pad.

3. In the plenary session that followed, there was a minute of shared silence, followed by a facilitated reflection on the extent to which the qualities/competencies listed by the focus groups were applied in the focus groups themselves (self-reflection).

The two-hour online workshop that followed the large group process took place on 5/5/2022. While the moderation was done by another member of the research team, the process was similar to the first workshop:

1. At the beginning of the workshop, participants reflected on their experiences and lessons learned from the trauma-informed large group process in groups of three.
2. In the 50 minutes hereafter, the following question was discussed in focus groups of five people each: "What qualities/competencies not yet mentioned do we need to build a sustainable democracy in the face of the current crises?" The focus groups were again guided to do two rounds of discussion on the question as well as to record the qualities or competencies they defined in an electronic document.
3. In the plenary session that followed, there was a minute of shared silence followed by a facilitated reflection on the question, "Looking back on the focus group, what is the most important change you can observe in yourself in light of participating in the large group process?"
4. Finally, the participants were asked to complete the SenseMaker again individually.

## 3.5  Evaluation and analysis

The main task in the evaluation phase of the project was initially to sift the wealth of data generated via SenseMaker, participatory observation and the focus groups. For a joint analysis and interpretation of the data, the research team came together for a two-day workshop in July 2022. In reviewing the micro-stories generated through the SenseMaker, we were guided by the questions formulated by the Cynefin Centre:

1.  What do you generally perceive?
2.  What confirms your previous assumptions?
3.  Where do conflicts and paradoxes arise?
4.  What did you learn? What was surprising?
5.  What do you want to explore deeper?

After reviewing a selection of micro-stories, we shared initial observations that condensed into first attributions through feedback with the data. Clustering the micro-stories based on selected characteristics (e.g., past-oriented stories) allowed for an initial description of dynamic relationships. The addition of and comparison with data obtained in the pre- and post-workshops and participatory observation, gradually corroborated our observations into coherent explanatory patterns. Assumptions were formulated and tested among the researchers, which were then subsequently further hardened by us through individual review and renewed clustering of the micro-narratives.

The qualities and competences named in the focus groups for building a democracy in the context of crises were screened, structured and assigned to keywords in order to make them presentable by means of word clouds. The word clouds provided us with an initial overview of the most important key- words and topics related to the focus groups' questions.

The entries of 15 observation protocols were transferred into an analogous flow chart. This revealed the sequences of the group process that were coded with high frequency. The codes were compared with the video material of the group process and with the comments of the observers recorded in the observation protocols. The research team then worked out process patterns and examined sequences with a remarkably high number of codes more closely.

This research report focuses on results that are relevant for us in terms of characterizing trauma-informed group processes in the context of democracy education. The evaluation of the rich data set is far from complete, but can be pursued further in the sense of an iterative research process. This report reflects only one phase, not the end point, of the collaborative research.

## 3.6  Limitations

The research presented here was influenced by limited time and financial resources, as well as the still developing state of the research in terms of theory and survey methods on the topic area under consideration. The caveats thus arising are:

The selection of participants (the so-called sample) is not representative of the pop- ulation as a whole and therefore is not readily generalizable or transferable without prior contextualization. Predominantly female persons in the age group over 55 took part, accounting for almost three-quarters of the participants (69.21 %). About one third of the participants stated in the registration form that they had previous experience with the work of Thomas Hübl or the Pocket Project. Additionally, about two-thirds of the participants mentioned that they already had experience in the field of trauma work. Furthermore, the participants had chosen themselves to participate based on their own interest and existing knowledge. This self-selection of the participants – especially with the current state of research

on trauma and democracy still in its infancy – also represented a special resource in terms of content. The high level of self-interest in the topic as well as the existing experience in the field of trauma work of two-thirds of the participants, favored strong participation both in the group process and in its reflection and research. This was also reflected in the large number of shared stories and thus evaluable data.

The high level of personal resources and competencies on the part of the process facilitators and group process leader on the one hand, and the high level of willing-ness and existing prior knowledge in trauma-sensitive process work on the part of the participants on the other, provide very fertile conditions for the implementation of the process. For an expansion and transfer of the prerequisite-rich process to other target groups and contexts, appropriate adaptations must be taken into ac-count and the securing of sufficient resources and competencies is central. Another methodological limitation was the evaluation of the observation protocols only by the research team. A joint evaluation with the observers was unfortunately not possible. A possible misinterpretation should be limited by the joint establishment of the observation criteria at the beginning of the process between members of the research team and the observers, as well as by the interpretation of the observa-tion data by several researchers.

With regard to the SenseMaker survey, there were some technical difficulties at the beginning of the workshop, partly due to the high number of first-time users. However, these were quickly resolved. Overall, due to limited time and financial resources, a selection had to be made in the evaluation, which could not compre-hensively take into account the wealth of qualitative data. It should also be men-tioned that SenseMaker is still in the process of being established in the academic context, so there is no standardized procedure. Scientific publications based on the SenseMaker have increased in recent years and were considered in the context of this study (see, for example, Wamsler et al. 2022 and van der Merwe et al. 2019). In

addition, strong support for the research team in the application and evaluation of the SenseMaker took place through the Cynefin Centre.

There are limitations with regard to the individual assignability of stories over time and thus also with regard to "before and after comparisons". This limits statements on precise changes in sensemaking on an individual level (e.g. how the evaluation of stories of one person changed during the process) and, to a certain extent, on the collective level (e.g. differentiations of how many participants exactly changed their assessments in which way). However, these changes can be observed on an aggre-gated level for the participants as a whole. The project also generated a large num-ber of detailed descriptions of individual resonance experiences, which provides opportunities for more systematic analyses and hypothesis testing in the future.

It is important to recognize that this study cannot conduct impact research under a strict understanding with regard to the trauma-informed large group process. Changes accompanying the process are established in the sense of correlation, but not causality. At most, initial assumptions can be made regarding the latter.

Due to the state of research, particularly in the field of collective trauma research, there is currently a lack of established and thus resilient concepts, which limits the validity (i.e. the unambiguity and reliability) of our empirical observations. Here, the research project contributes to the development and reflection of working defi-nitions and the exploration and development of initial patterns and relations in the thematic complex of trauma, crisis and democracy. Thus, it is a pioneering scientific work that aims to stimulate further research into interrelations and causalities.

# Results

# 4  Results

In the results section, we first present the evaluation of the participatory observation as well as the focus groups data. The evaluation of the participatory observation serves to provide a better understanding of the large group process itself. The evaluation of the focus group data shows the participants' assessment of central democratic competencies and qualities, as well as the change in this assessment after the group process. Finally, the evaluation of the SenseMaker data takes up the largest part of the chapter. From the abundance and complexity of the data generated by the software in the form of personal stories, we work out patterns and tendencies.

## 4.1  Evaluation of participatory observation and focus groups

**Participatory observation**
A total of 355 people participated in the trauma-informed large group process. About one third of them stated in the registration form that they had previous experience with the work of Thomas Hübl or the Pocket Project. About two thirds of the participants already had experience in the field of trauma work.

The flow chart in Figure 1 on the following page provides a good overview of the different elements and topics of the three-day large group process. While the first part of the event focused on the topic of war, the second part addressed the Corona crisis and its effects.
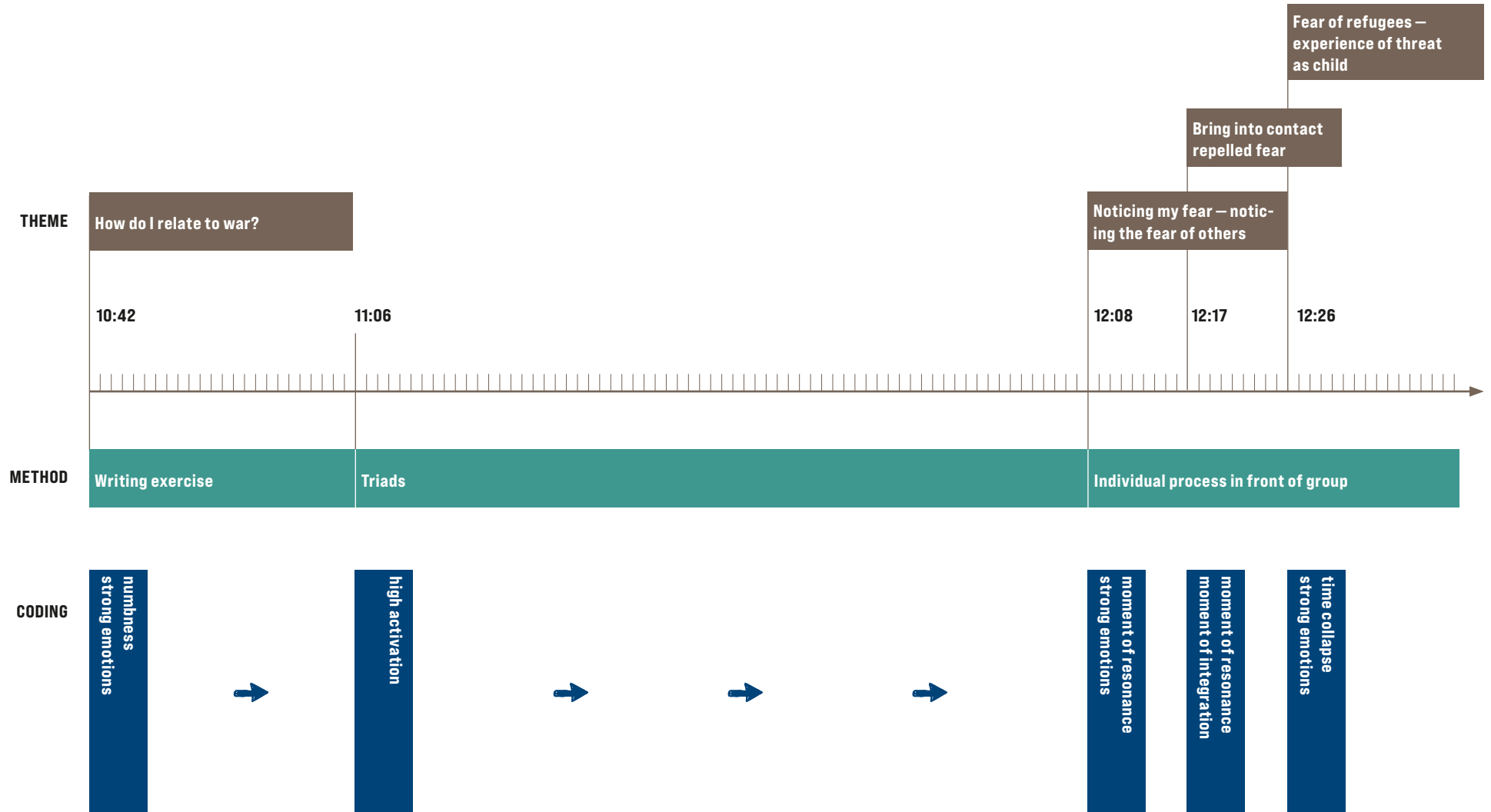
Figure 1 abstains from displaying the introduction part on 4/28/22 as well as the end of the group process on 5/1/22, but focuses on the main process days. 4/29/22: After starting with a reflective writing exercise on the question "How do I relate to war?", personal experiences related to war and flight were discussed first in triads, and second in conversation with the process facilitator Thomas Hübl. Against the backdrop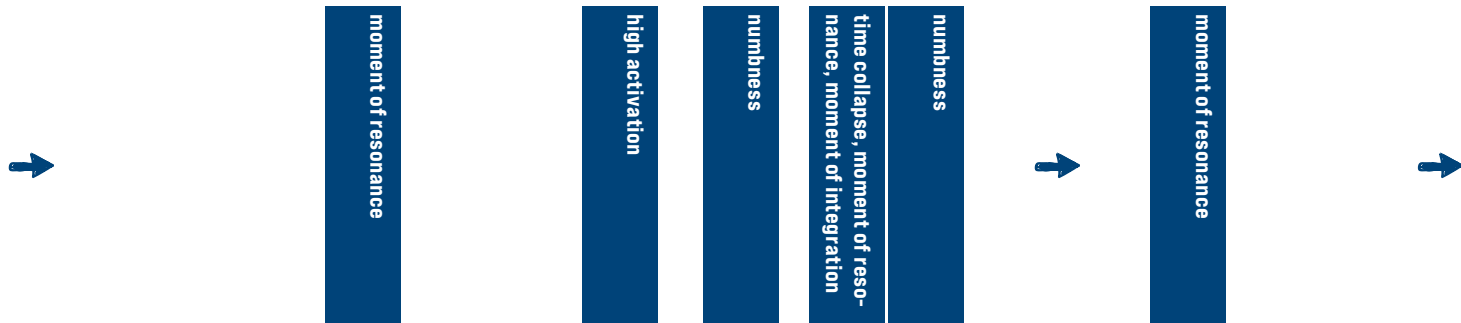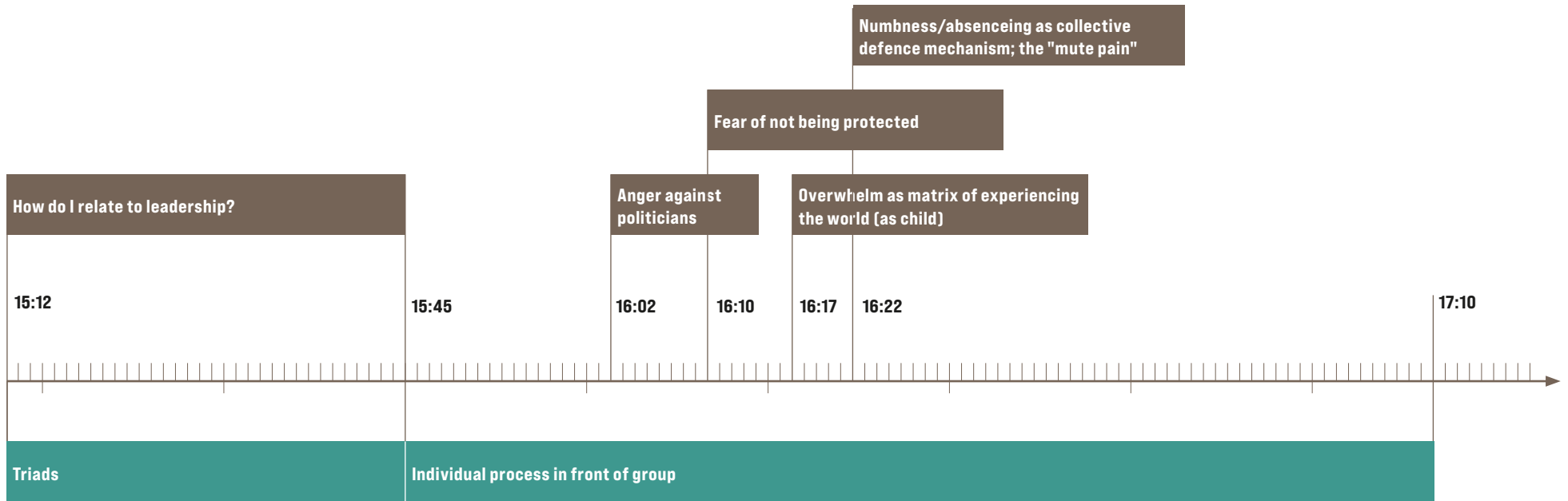 of the war in Ukraine, the relationship with Russia was explored in more detail both in a second writing exercise and in individual work in front of the group and in triads. 4/30/22: The psychological, social and political effects of the Corona crisis were reflected on in a writing exercise and deepened in individual work in front of the group and in triads.

Themes that evoked stronger emotional reactions in the participants and were coded "strong emotions" at least three times by the participant observers are listed in the following: ambivalent relationship to Russia (coded 5 times), fear of refugees (coded 4 times), overwhelming experiences during childhood (coded 4 times), pain and sadness in the face of East German history (coded 4 times), homophobia as an echo of the Holocaust (coded 4 times), absence of the father (coded 3 times), war and fear (coded 3 times).

A total of 10 sequences of the 3-day large group process were coded with a high number of quality features by several observers. This indicates a good agreement regarding the selection of sequences and their coding among the 15 participant observers.

**FIGURE 1:  FLOWCHART WITH ELEMENTS, TOPICS AND CODING**
**4/29/22**

**Pain in former East German, the wall in us**

**How is my relation-ship to Russia?**

**Noticing the ambivalence in relating with Russia**

**East and West Germans learn from/are listening to each other.**

**Expressing connectedness**

**17:10**

**17:25**

**17:50**

**18:10**

**18:23**

**20:34**

| Writing exercise | Triads | Individual process in front of group | Triads | Final reflections |
|---|---|---|---|---|

strong emotions
moment of resonance
moment of integration

time collapse
numbness
strong emotions

moment of integration
moment of resonance

moment of coherence

**4/30/22**

**THEME**

Relating to our (separated) feelings =
our relationship to the world

Experience of separa-
tion as child becomes
matrix of experienc-
ing COVID

How have we been developing with
the Corona virus?

Homophobia as echo of the
Holocaust

10:50   11:05   11:45   12:32   12:52 12:55

**METHOD**

Discussion with
experts

Writing exercise

Triads

Individual process in front of group

**KODIERUNG**

moment of resonance

numbness

time collapse
strong emotions

strong emotions
moment of resonance

numbness
polarization

COVID intensifies panic and
decontextualization

Through embodiment we
become part of

Absence
of fathers
results in
lack of ori-
entation

Withdrawal as child,
"freezing" versus
feeling

Need for digestive spaces
for health professionals
during COVID

COVID activates
traumatic experiences
during flight

Resistance to leader-
ship as heritage of the
Holocaust

13:10

15:26

16:00

16:15

16:35

18:03

18:16

16:02

Individual process in front of group

Triads

Individual process
in front of group

moment of coherence

time collapse
numbness

moment of integration

numbness

moment of coherence

agency

moment of resonance
moment of coherence
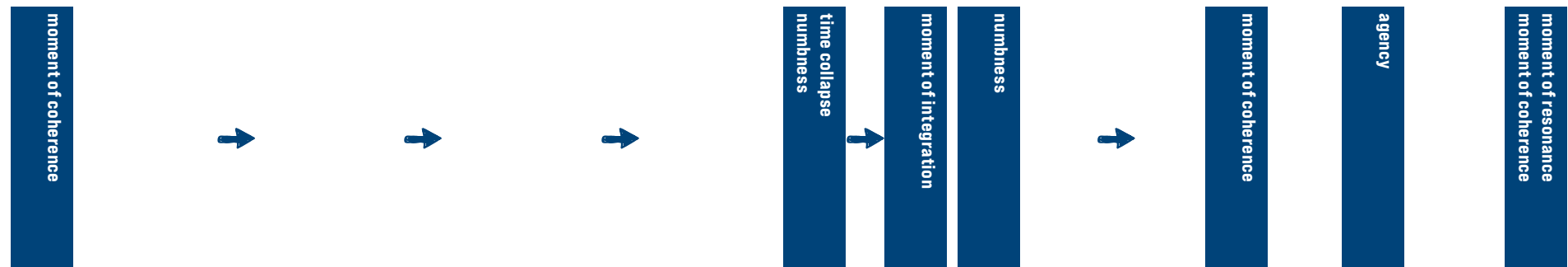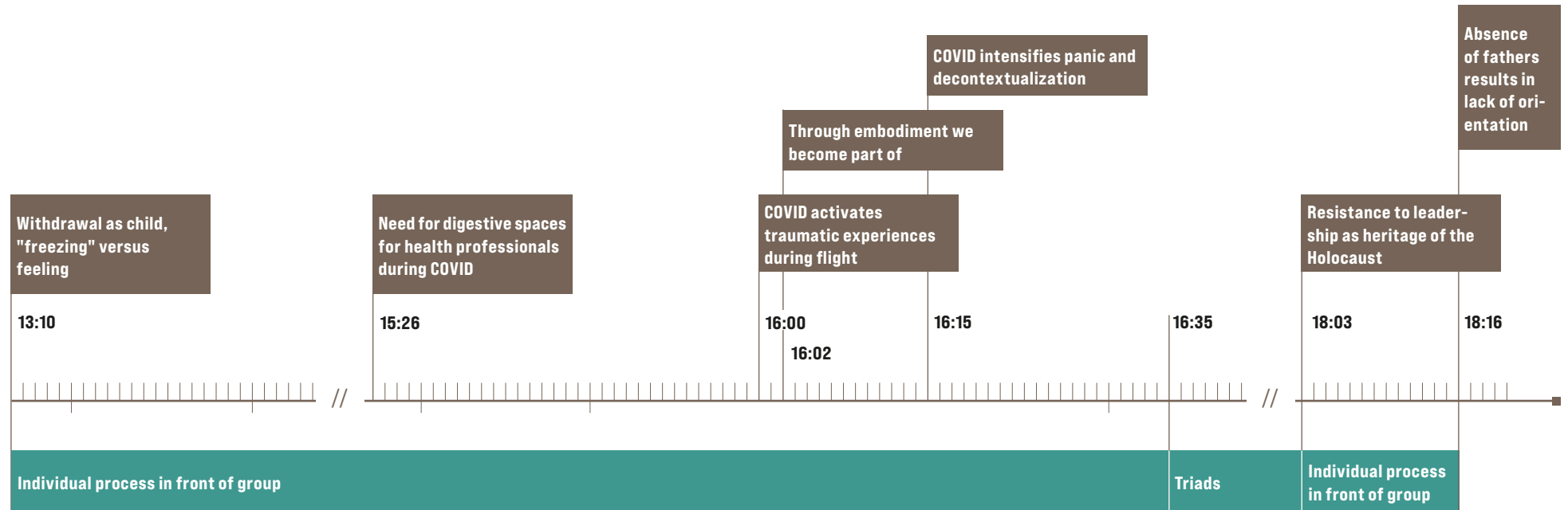
On the basis of the participatory observation, the course of process work of individual participants with the process leader Thomas Hübl can be outlined as follows: First, a focusing and awareness building of the current psychological, emotional and somatic state of mind took place, which often presented itself as emotional numbness, confusion and/or strong emotional activation. While initially emotions were often directed outwards towards structures or the "others" (e.g., fear of refugees, fear of increasing polarization, anger towards politicians), the developing relational space between participants and leadership as well as the group enabled a deeper engagement with the current inner experience. The active turning to the not-feeling or to frightening emotional contents opened access to past (childlike) experiences of feeling overwhelmed, feeling afraid, being alone, etc. When these emerge and are felt in the safe space of relatedness and with others appreciatively witnessing, more awareness of one's own stance and positions as well as one's relationship to the world emerges. From the flow chart it can be deduced that moments of numbness and/or high activation through process work of individuals in front of the group, move into moments of integration and coherence. The movement from emotional numbness to greater liveliness and active participation is also reflected in the individual narrative trajectories of participants, as we will show in Chapter 4.2, Part III.

The quality feature "integration moment" was mentioned most frequently in connection with the emergence of topics and experiences concerning East and West Germany. Here, failures in the process of growing together of East and West and the lack of overall social reappraisal, became very palpable. The pain about the lack of visibility of "the East" then and now, was deeply and intensively experienced within the large group. The flow chart also makes it clear that relaxation and a moment of integration occur when pain, shame and anger are addressed by individuals and heard within the triads of participants.

It is also noticeable that in 5 situations the code "simultaneity of past and present" was used by at least three coders. The code refers to the concept of "time collapse" according to Volkan, in which memories, feelings and perceptions regarding a past event are linked to current events (Volkan 1999). The idea is explained in more detail in Chapter 5.2.

The observed sequences of quality features characterizing the group process, allow initial assumptions to be derived: the process made previously inaccessible experiences perceptible to the participants, thus experiences became more workable. Further empirical analyses are desirable and necessary for the creation of an impact model of the trauma-informed large group process.

**Focus groups**
The fact that more than one third of the total number of participants in the group process (155 out of 355 people) took part in the first workshop indicates a high level of motivation among the participants. The "return rate" in the second workshop was high as well with 78 participants (half of the participants in the first focus groups), which also indicates a high level of commitment within the sample.

In the first workshop, 28 focus groups were formed; with 14 in the second workshop. The focus groups before the large group process differed from those after the large group process in terms of their composition, as participants were randomly assigned to the groups. Thus, no direct comparison of the individual focus groups can be made. Conclusions about changes between the overall focus groups of workshops 1 and 2 can however be drawn in the sense of trend statements.

An initial review and structuring of the qualities and competencies relevant to democracy in the context of crises named by participants reveal that the content of the focus groups in workshops 1 and 2 is very similar overall. Typical mentions were "attentive listening", "appreciative communication", "appreciation of diversity" and "distinguishing without dividing". However, new content emerged in the focus groups of the second workshop (e.g., "coming to terms with the past", "healing",

"compassion in dealing with oneself", "depth"), suggesting a clear connection between subjective/emotional and political/societal processes. In the focus groups preceding the large group process, there are comparatively frequent mentions of aspects related to external structures and processes: e.g., "supportive structures", "freedom of the press", "citizen participation", "vibrant education system", "secure basic services" or "culture of listening" and "cooperation instead of competition".

From the focus groups held after the event, there are comparatively more mentions of aspects referring to participant's inner feelings, e.g., "inner work", "emotional healing", "holding the shadows within", "being a pole of calm in the midst of hot discussions". Whereas the first focus groups mentioned a greater accumulation of experiences of lack and of democratic deficits, the second were characterized by a focus on "ability", potential, on fullness and possibilities. The complexity inherent in the aspects (e.g. democractic participation, listening, inner work) mentioned is also described in more detail and in a more differentiated manner, as well as formulated from the standpoint of subjective experience. While the first set of focus groups was mainly concerned with current problems, the second set of focus groups reveals a positive orientation towards the future. The participants' statements express a "hands-on attitude", a thirst for action with a view to shaping a future conducive to life, and a desire – or even a deeply felt need – to play a personal part in this. The following table provides an overview of the trends outlined above.

**TABLE 1: FOCUS GROUPS IN BEFORE AND AFTER COMPARISON**

| **Focus groups 1**<br>**(1 week before the group process)** | **Focus groups 2**<br>**(5 days after the group process)** |
| --- | --- |
| great similarity in emphasis on competencies such as appreciative communication, mindful listening, valuing diversity, and cohesion | |
| stronger focus on social structures and processes in the context of democracy | stronger focus on personal, inner experience of the participants |
| stronger focus on demands ("must-have") and deficits, "defensive", needy attitude | stronger focus on creative possibilities and self-efficacy, own freedom to do something |
| focus on current problems and challenges | more forward-looking |
| qualities are named rather abstractly as catchwords | more differentiation in the formulation of qualities |
| formulation from a neutral position, "knowledge about" | formulation of insights from one's own experience, "embodied knowledge" |

Overall, the results of the focus groups indicate that the initial distance from politics and democracy perceived by participants changed through the group process towards new possibilities of a lived democratic practice. This tendency is also confirmed by the course of the narrative landscapes, as we will show in the following chapter.

## 4.2 Evaluation SenseMaker

As explained in Chapter 3.4, the micro-stories were recorded by the SenseMaker software and assessed by the participants themselves. This report cannot provide a comprehensive analysis of the 643 stories and their ratings. However, initial trends and tendencies are clearly emerging and are described in the following section. The analysis moves from the overall picture of all stories to selected areas, followed by a dynamic view of all stories in the course of the process, and finally a view of selected courses of individual persons. It combines the general and the specific, the static and the dynamic.

In the first section of the evaluation section, we look at the total number of stories collected from 4/21/22–5/8/22 to get a comprehensive look at the complexity and richness of the narrative landscape and to get a first impression of the pattern formations. In doing so, we first recognize a large number of narratives in which participants perceive themselves as self-efficacious, co-creative and in flux. We then look at narrative condensations/clusters that contain interesting patterns and information in relation to our research questions. In the context of SenseMaker analysis, we speak of "weak signals"; the focus is not on the quantitative number of stories, but on qualitative statements. This enables insights that are otherwise often lost in the abundance of data.

The second section of the SenseMaker evaluation includes a before and after comparison of stories generated in the period before the large group process (4/21/22–4/28/22) and in the period after (5/1/22-5/8/22). Here, the triads presented in the first section were compared in their development over time and supplemented with selected dyads. The extent to which the stories were entered by the same participants can only be determined in individual cases (see following section). The aim was to determine the extent to which the narrative landscape as such is changing. Whether and to what extent this can be attributed causally to the large group process must be further investigated empirically elsewhere. Initial insights indicate a positive change in the narrative landscape in the course of the group process.

In the third and final section, the stories of individual persons, which were entered at different points in time, are compared with each other in order to trace the process of change of individual participants. The stories are presented below as they were written by the participants. Only spelling mistakes have been corrected for better readability. The stories were translated by the authors. Please, see German report for stories in original language.
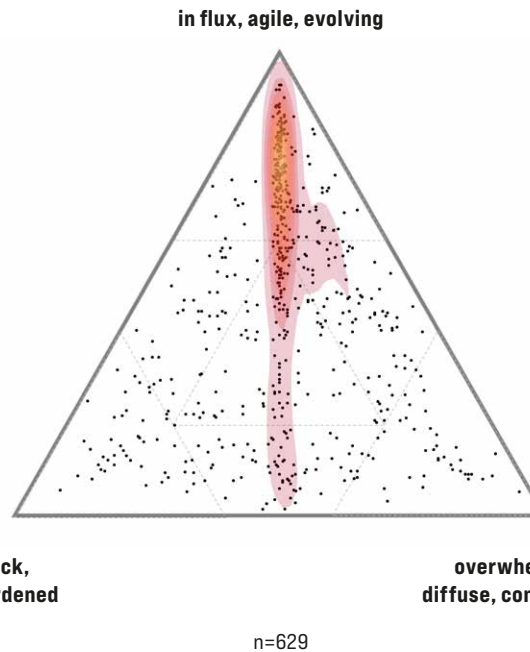
## I. The narrative landscapes at a glance

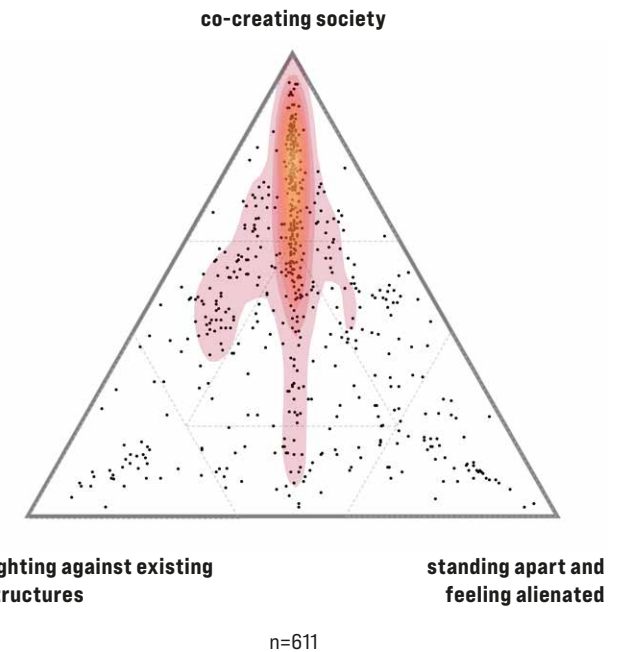**General trend: In flux, engaged and co-creating society**

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE MYSELF ...**

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE THE SITUATION AS ...**

**REFLECTING MY STORY, I EXPERIENCE MYSELF AS SOMEONE WHO IS ...**



numb, hopeless

"triggered", activated

engaged, curious

n=615



in flux, agile, evolving

stuck, hardened

overwhelming, diffuse, confusing

n=629



co-creating society

fighting against existing structures

standing apart and feeling alienated

n=611

A first look at the total number of stories makes it clear that they are overwhelmingly located at the poles of "engaged, curious", "in flux, agile, developing" and "co-creatively shaping our society". The micro-narratives express optimism, a willingness to create and an orientation towards the future. The majority of the narratives that clearly fall into the positive poles of the three triads were entered during or at the end of the group process or after the event (out of 145 micro-stories, only 9 were entered before the event). The micro-stories look forward and convey possibilities for shaping the world. They speak of a desire for contact with others and for shared social action as a consequence of a new or renewed connection with self and others. Central is the experience of connectedness, which arises, on the one hand, from a deeper understanding of one's own history and the coming into being of others; and on the other, from the fact that one's own, sometimes painful ex- periences in the context of social crises have been shared and witnessed by others. A selection of these stories are listed below. They begin with a title assigned by the participants, date of recording (both in **bold**), followed by more detailed explanation:

45

**Gratitude – April 30, 2022** *I have had the opportunity to explore myself and in exchange with others how my relationship to society and democracy became what it is ... How childhood experiences and even experiences of my parents and grandparents still make me react in certain ways today ... Exciting to realize that! At the same time, I feel a deep gratitude for the resilience that was given to me through my family. I feel this coherence within me as a mandate to make my contribution to society and realize more and more that I am on the right track.*

**Summary – May 1, 2022** *I am touched by the diversity and depth of human experience and that we ALL learn from each other. I benefited greatly from the quality of listening and I feel connectedness. I can now better observe within myself when I am polarizing and when resistance is awakening within me. I feel that when I can be soft in and with myself, the softness causes me to be able to perceive the other person whole-body and to perceive and feel them better without immediately judging, devaluing or pigeonholing. I have become more sensitive to my own triggers. I am extremely grateful.*

**Strengthened sense of connection to my fellow human beings – May 2, 2022** *In the project with Thomas Hübl over the last 4 days, a very strong sense of safe space and a very strong sense of connection to the other participants has developed. I feel like everyone has his/her stressful points from the past. I feel a much stronger connection to the fellow participants and also to the people around me.*

**After the workshop – 5 May 2022** *My experience after the workshop: I told many friends about it, a lot of interest and positive response to the topic. Were almost all interested in participating themselves. I am more sensitive to myself and to the emotions of others. Feel clearer and more stringent ... Walk through the world with a different perception, notice my "absent" parts more, pay more attention and let it be. Go into relationship more consciously, show myself with vulnerability, "lonely one becomes two". Looking forward to a workshop I'm giving at the university, where it will be about the perception of our body, to me, to others and the ecosystem of the ocean!*

**Narrative value – May 1, 2022** *There was a weekend workshop on trauma and democracy, and they asked you to contribute stories and experiences. At first I didn't know what that was about, and as time went on I realized, wow, this is great! What stories I and all of us have to tell! What a difference collecting and telling those stories makes! Even with all my own stories. Suddenly I feel like I really do have a lot to tell — and it's worth hearing — and someone is even asking me about it! And for all the many others, the same is true! What undiscovered treasures there must be in our community AND in society! What a great experience! Thank you!*

**Specific observations: "Weak Signals"**

Away from the agglomerations of stories in the three triads presented above, one finds areas where smaller clusters or even single stories are located. In the following we do not consider all, but a selection of these "***Weak Signals***".

**Weak Signals 1:**
**Between the poles "'triggered', activated" and "numb, hopeless"**

*"From our point of view, the mind is an embodied and relational, emergent, self-organizing process. That which is regulated by the mind is energy and information flow. The self-organization of a complex system distinguishes elements and then combines them to shape the movement of the system toward harmony. Without such flexible, adaptive, coherent, energized, and stable integration movement, the system is prone to chaos, rigidity, or both."*

(Siegel 2012, p. 192)

The aim of the triad "'triggered', activated – numb, hopeless – engaged, curious" was to look at in which stories participants experience themselves as engaged and curious and when rigidity or high activation restricts or impedes an embodied, related and emergent response to environmental conditions.

Disorientation, confusion and overwhelm – "everything is too much" – is described as the core experience of the Corona pandemic in the stories, which are located between the dimensions "'triggered', activated" and "numb, hopeless". In the context of the controversial measures to contain the pandemic, the experience of no longer being able to refer to a common logic or language when communicating with (close) people led to pervasive uncertainty. The polarization of public discourses and the hasty assignment to one or the other opinion camp, rendered people powerless and speechless. In terms of sensemaking, apparent worldviews appeared as insurmountably separate. The uncertainty in dealing with the pandemic gripping politics and society, also reactivated personal experiences of childhood disorientation and lack of parental guidance.

**Corona shock due to loss of friends – April 30, 2022** *The Corona measures have brought very painful experiences for me. My increasingly critical stance was brusquely rejected from the outset in my closest personal circle of friends and in the circle of political friends, without me ever having asked myself why and with what thoughts I came to this stance. This experience still sits in my bones today, because even though some of it is now water under the bridge, nothing has been discussed or clarified. So I can hardly continue my political work as before. […]*

**The rupture – 21 April 2022** *How, as part of the preparation for a public mediation event at the start of the Corona pandemic, virtual spaces of trust were to be opened up by allowing people to listen to and share their experiences with each other and inviting all interested mediators to do so via social media networks and to co-organise this on their own initiative. However, within the core preparatory team of professional mediators, there was extreme polarization on the range of existing views on Corona — with increasing escalation; excluding those who personally viewed Corona differently to so-called public opinion on Corona and held "alternative views". Despite the mediative attitude that all views should be there and be heard, deep emotional reactions occurred in the preparation team, which had a negative effect on the actual behaviour and interaction with each other.*

**Polarizations – April 21, 2022** *I am troubled by the fact that some of my companions and friends can hardly go along in conversations with the perspective, that military interventions of any kind cannot be the way to build peace. There was once a clear and greater agreement among us. Concerning Corona there were some difficult situations, also with "old friends", who put me in "right-wing" corners or conspiracy corners etc., because I took or take a critical attitude to the measures.*

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE MYSELF ...**



numb, hopeless

"triggered", activated

engaged, curious

n=615
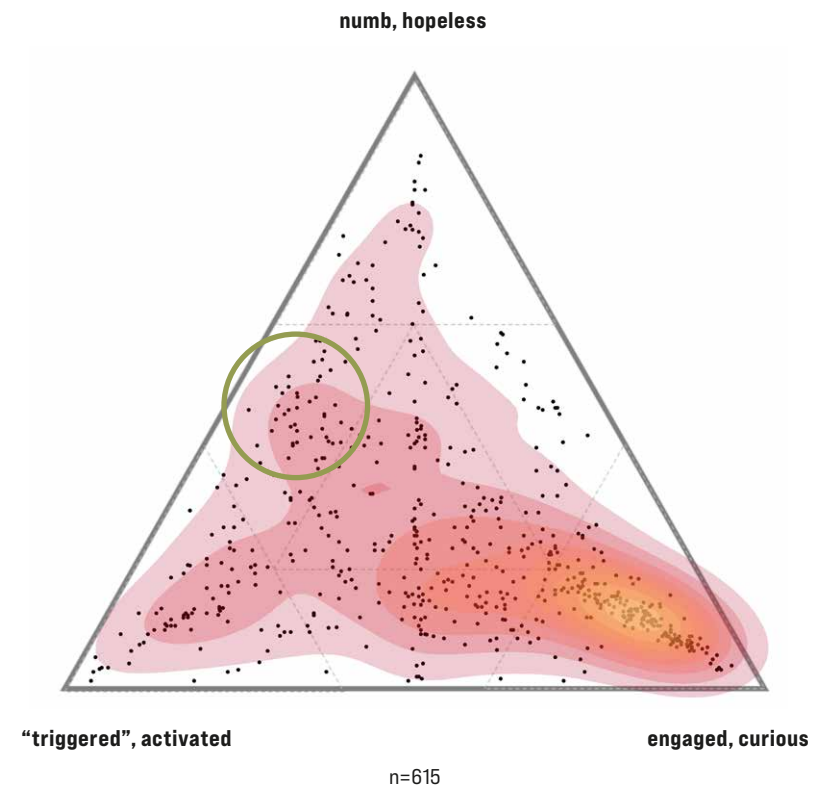
**Weak Signals 2:**
**At the pole "'triggered', activated"**

Within the triad "'triggered', activated – numb, hopeless – engaged, curious" is a small cluster of narratives at the "'triggered', activated" pole. These narratives illustrate that in the context of the Ukraine war and also the Corona pandemic, personal traumatic memories become active, linking to collective trauma fields. The inner "emotional land-scapes" of fear, of existential threat, of being alone influence the view on the current crises as well as the way of dealing with them.

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE MYSELF ...**



n=615
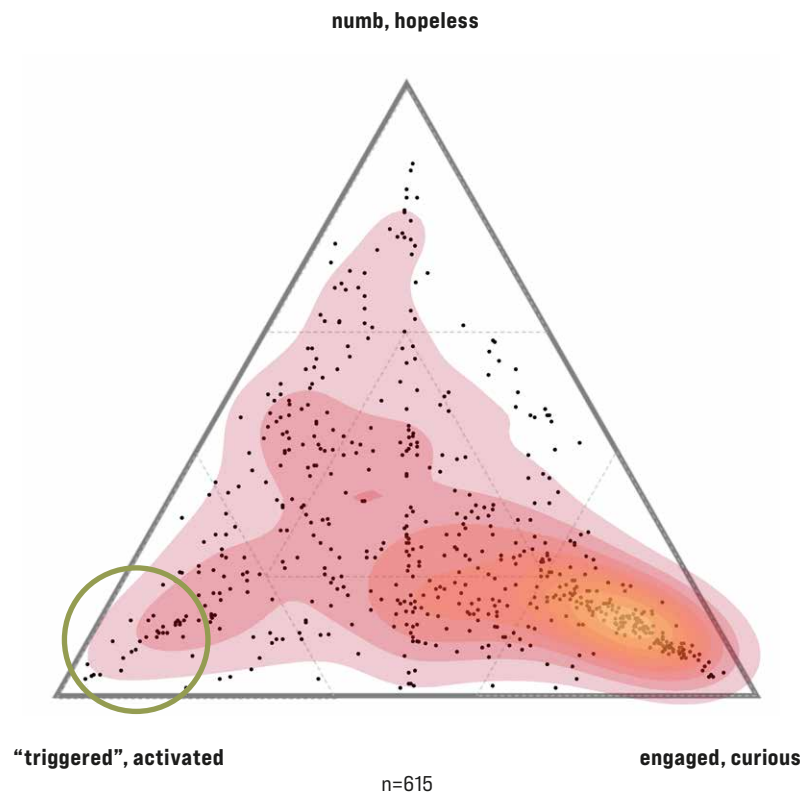
**The lost fathers – May 5, 2022** *I saw the children playing in the yard. Two of them are strangers, they have been there for a few days and come from Ukraine. When I see them, my tears run and the phrase comes to me: they need their father. My neighbour says: they do have a father, and he is surely happy that they are safe now. I cry and realize that this pain comes from my own depths. My grandmother already lost her father because he shot himself in the economic crisis after WWI. My grandfather was shot and killed in WWII. My father attempted to escape across the German-German border as a young man and wasn't shot, but he was imprisoned. He had to do his military service in the National People's Army when my brother and I were young children. My brother later became depressed and separated from his family when he was an adult, and my marriage also ended when my own children were not quite fledged. I stand at the window and cry: the children need their father after all. It is myself who mourns for their father and the lost men in the family. The image of Ukrainian mothers with their children and the fathers left behind washes my own pain to the surface. [...]*

**Acknowledging my trauma – "not feeling" saved me then – April 29, 2022** *I notice how numbly I look at the horrific images of war in Ukraine. In the silence, images from my earliest childhood emerge in me: emaciated soldiers returning from captivity, some of them amputees, playing in ruins, being bombed out, hunger, poverty, feeling alone.*

**Shoah works in me – April 30, 2022** *So slowly the realization is maturing in me (intellectually it is there) that the Shoah works in me too. (My grandfather survived Auschwitz when he was 15). Although both of my parents do a lot of trauma healing and are dedicated to their issues. I felt such a strong resonance in me today when talking to a person about his/her experience of the Corona period, and I am experiencing it similarly; I see the dynamics too and relate them to dynamics in the Shoah and dynamics that were before and that led to it. I just realize that all of this is working in us, and that we haven't worked through [it]. And that part of coming to terms with it is what we are doing right now — and not just maintaining cemeteries or commemorating the dead. But also seeing the living.*

**Weak Signals 3:**
**Between the poles of "stuck, hardened" and "overwhelming, diffuse, confusing"**

*"At the same time, politicians themselves often portray their own actions as not relating to a deliberative, collective decision-making process, but rather as necessary, even coercive, responding to structural pressures to adapt that arise, for example, from economic realities. At least in this respect, Chancellor Gerhard 'Enough' Schröder and Angela 'We have no alternative' Merkel do not really differ. The resonance wire between politics or politicians and citizens thus proves to be disconnected from both sides, with each side influencing, obstructing, and manipulating the other, but generally never really accomplishing, touching, or moving anything; the relationship of representation is rigid, hardened, and in no way fluid."*

<div align="right">(Rosa, 2019, p. 216)</div>

The triad "stuck, hardened – overwhelming, diffuse, confusing – in flux, moving, evolving" describes the extent to which a fluid, resonant relationship is possible for the participants in the democratic context within their respective story. While the majority of stories fall into the "in flux, moving, evolving" pole, narratives between the "stuck, hardened" and "overwhelming, diffuse, confusing" axis clearly speak to the fact that a good number of participants have lost their trust in politics and are opting out. Here, the focus of engagement, if it exists at all, shifts to the immediate, local place where something still seems moveable. The micro-stories suggest that the ability to relate between citizens and political representatives is disturbed/injured. The fluid, collective process of democratic decision-making seems to be lost in the rigidity of the system or the diffuse complexity of society.

**Circle of representation – April 30, 2022**  *As a citizen, I feel held back from important decisions. My direct bearing on current decisions is so hampered that I run myself ragged and then don't even start. I need small, close circles to share, with influence in larger circles with the political representatives, thus reaching into the current government.*

**Disenchantment with politics – April 28, 2022**  *I was watching the news yesterday and realized that I know almost no names of our Ministers since the last election. But I also almost don't care ... Like it doesn't matter who's at the helm now — no good can really be expected from any of them. My trust in our state and its representatives is very much diminished!*

**Anger – April 22, 2022**  *When the German Bundestag [Federal Parliament] decided at the beginning of April to put 100 billion euros into arming the Bundeswehr [Federal Armed Forces], I felt stunned and helpless. I actually thought it was part of common knowledge that rearmament in the case of warlike conflicts (third parties) causes just the opposite of pacification, namely the danger of further escalation and spread of war. I am also dismayed when I hear or read about statistics which show that a large number of the population is behind rearmament. How can credible peace talks be held or offered in parallel? By German politicians hardly at all. What can I do myself, apart from signing peace appeals or making a few donations to civil society organizations in Ukraine? It would be a small act of peaceful strength to send peaceful thoughts to the supporters of the rearmament decision instead of being angry at them. I can't quite manage it yet! Overall, I experience a strong helplessness and anger towards the actions of our politicians inside, who form the majority. Strong distrust of their political competence and incorruptibility leads me to reject them and how they function.*

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE THE SITUATION AS ...**



in flux, moving, evolving

stuck, hardened

overwhelming, diffuse, confusing
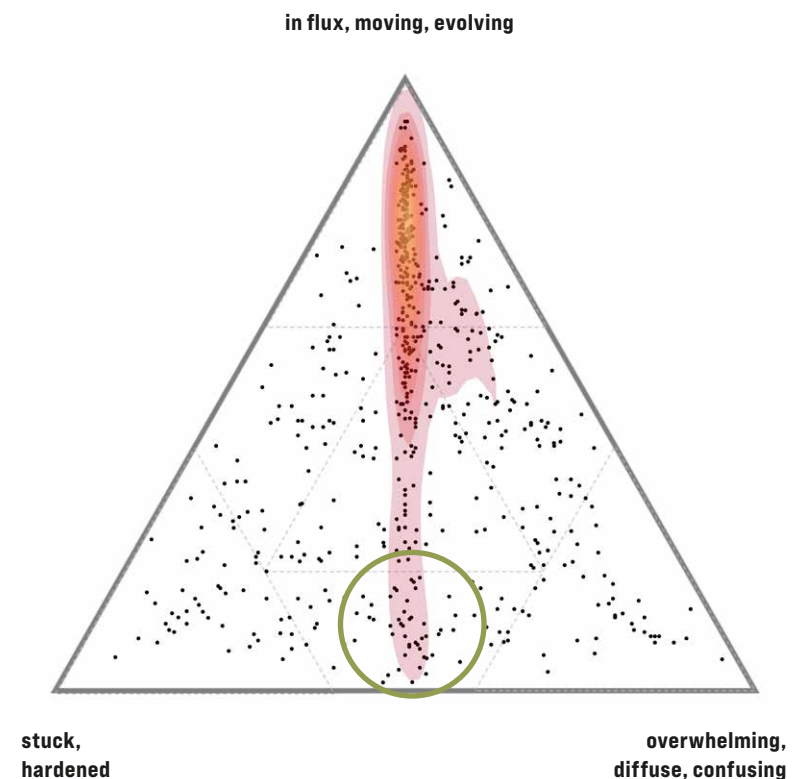
**Weak Signals 4:**
**Between the poles of "fighting against structures" and "feeling alienated"**

The triad "fighting against structures – shaping society co-creatively – standing apart and feeling alienated" aims at the participants' perceived self-efficacy, which according to Rosa is closely linked to the ability to resonate. To what extent do participants experience themselves as someone who can co-create society? Again, the vast majority of the stories occur at the upper co-creative pole. By contrast, however, there is a small cluster ("Weak Signals") of stories between the poles of "struggling against structures" and "standing apart and feeling alienated". While these are significantly fewer stories, their content is similar. They point to a drifting apart of society in Germany. There are reports of experiences of exclusion and defamation, and of being hastily assigned to an opinion camp. Several participants have the impression that the positions of the citizens are no longer heard and that they are not represented in the political system. The topics of war and pandemics are also clearly in the foreground.

**REFLECTING MY STORY, I EXPERIENCE MYSELF AS SOMEONE WHO IS …**



co-creating society

fighting against existing
structures

standing apart and
feeling alienated

n = 611
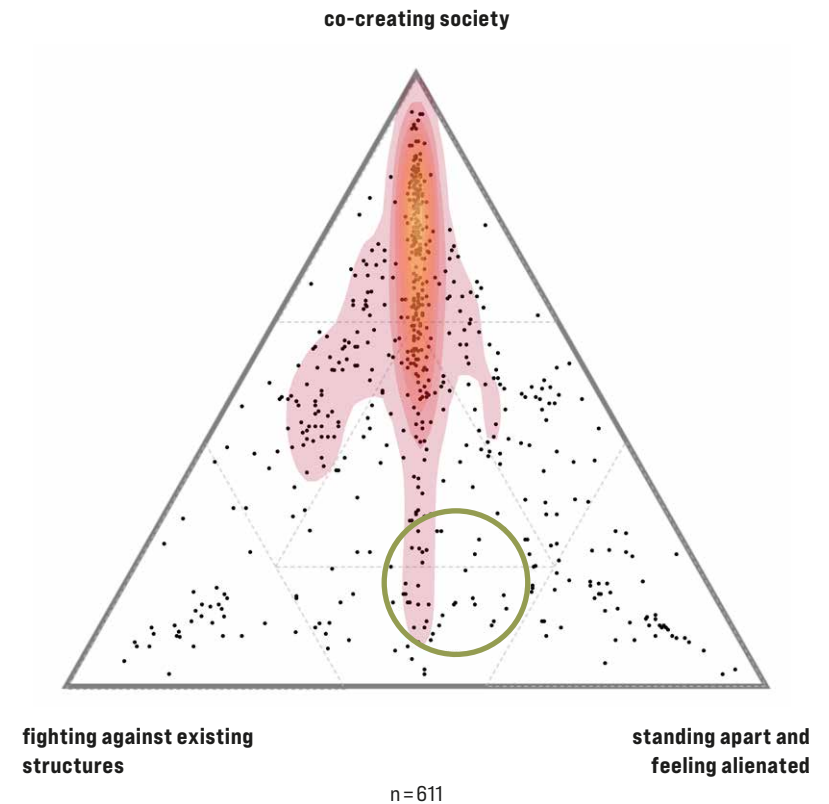
**Basic renewal of democracy – April 29, 2022** *The current political system is a mirror of the ROOT of the problems we see in the world. It is incapable of moving the crises towards resolution because, on the contrary, it has helped create the problems. It needs a fundamental renewal in which a sentient connection with all beings becomes supreme and the outside space is interpreted as a mirror of the inside space. Democracy as a stage for competing powers must be replaced by democracy as a framework for cooperation and synergy. Incidentally, my personal political viewpoints have completely disappeared from the political discussion in recent crises. I feel marginalized, criminalized, defamed and no longer represented.*

**When there's only "right" or "wrong" – April 29, 2022** *How important it is to know like-minded people when you don't share official views. How much the restriction of social life stresses you out. How much pressure there is on dissenters. How little of voluntarism remains when one must fear for one's existence or cannot afford to think otherwise. How long scientifically disproved facts are propagated to justify things and to influence opinion. How often "contrary" thoughts were acceptable a few months later (e.g. herd immunity). How much trust in politics was lost, because one had the impression that only that part of scientific knowledge was consulted which was convenient for politics, this also applies to the selection of scientific advisory panels. How many public letters of renowned scientists, physicians and other social groups with different opinions were not heeded, let alone discussed publicly in terms of content. How many demonstrations were not even mentioned in the leading media and how much the media tried to push their participants into a political corner in order to devalue their opinion. [...] How society has become further divided, even if the majority is unaware of this.*

**One-dimensionality as the new normal – a horror story – April 30, 2022** *I am shocked about how in the pandemic and partly also now in the Ukraine war completely narrow views are gaining the power of opinion and one-dimensional solutions (vaccination/armament) are not only praised as having no alternative but are widely accepted — not only by the vast majority of politicians but also by the media and obviously by many citizens. And how, on this basis, people who think and act differently (people who are sceptical about vaccination/people who are turned towards Russia) are hated, denigrated, muzzled or ridiculed, or even legally discriminated against and officially excluded — and the vast majority of those who are not affected silently go along with this. I would not have thought such a thing possible — especially against the background of German history. The shock is still deep inside me and this "new normal" gives me the creeps.*

**Weak Signals 5:**
**Between the poles of "present" and "past"**

The triad "past – present – future" describes the time dimension of the stories. The largest clus-terof stories is in the middle of the triad indiciating that the participants refer to the present, past and future in a balanced way or have difficulties assigning their stories to one time dimension. Micro-narratives, which are located between the present and the past, focus in particular on the Ukraine war and the German relationship with Russia. They show how both personal experiences from the Second World War and social and family memories of war violence influence the percep-tion of Russia and the war of aggression in Ukraine.

**MY STORY RELATES TO …**



n = 642
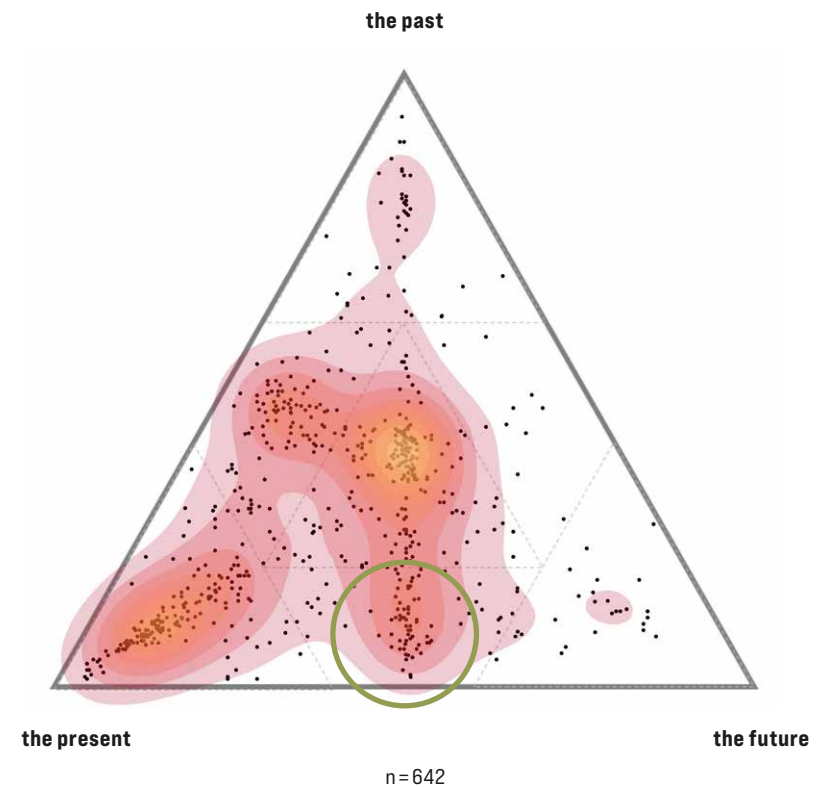
**Influence of war – May 2, 2022**  *At the beginning of the Ukraine war, it was reported on television how Russian troops were stationed on the Russian-Ukrainian border weeks before, and as time went on, the number of stationed soldiers increased. At the same time, I could see in myself that an internal paralysis was occurring at a similar rate, peaking on the day of the invasion. As someone born in World War II, I thought, there was a connection to these sensations, which was confirmed over the following weeks. Since that time I have felt limited in my intuition and creativity, accompanied by depressive moods and numbness of feeling.*

**My shutdown – May 3, 2022**  *When I see reports from Ukraine, especially when I see mothers with children, it overwhelms me with deep pain in my heart and makes me very sad. I see my mother as a child. But what is incidental is that I feel no impulse to help, and that is a side of me that I judge a bit.*

**Numbness in the Ukraine war – April 29, 2022**  *I tell about my experience with the war in Ukraine. About my numbness with it. That I pretty much can't feel all the drama. I perceive it factually. Interested in the news, but it doesn't touch my heart. It occurs to me that my grandma fled the Russians, but I could never feel her fear. She talked about it a lot, but more about getting help, that "the Russians" had parties and she was always invited. And also that they were cruel. And then I ask myself: is there a connection between my current numbness and that of my grandmother, with whom I grew up?*

**Weak Signals 6:**
**At the "future" pole**

**Hope – April 29, 2022**  *It's such an exciting time, and we can really contribute via supporting spaces where being compassionately in-touch with extremely difficult issues is possible — in the body, with feelings or emotions, with tension or with feelings of being overwhelmed. So much connection, drive and creativity arises in this way. I am so grateful to be able to experience such a space in the workshop on democracy and collective trauma right now.*

**The sentient parliament – 29 April 2022**  *I learned to feel more and more, and because I could feel myself more, I could feel other people more. That's how my contribution to a feeling democracy came about. And because we could feel more together, we could also make faster and better decisions. The complexity of inner and outer crises became transparent and the complexity became simpler. The place for this work: the elected parliament as the supreme legislator in the country … and the many small parliaments and citizens across the country.*

**Shaping change together – April 21, 2022**  *I experience this time as a great opportunity for change in all areas of society. For me, a vivid interest has emerged in helping to shape new systems for togetherness and being-for-others. Especially my heart has opened for politics, I feel called for the first time to help shape change, to redefine politics and to work together. A community has formed around me that is committed to change, it is amazing how quickly people connect with a common vision and come together in action, including for the true values of democracy. There is also a focus on coming to terms with society's past, very exciting and healing. My heart beats for that, too.*

**MY NARRATION RELATES TO …**



the past

the present

the future

n = 642
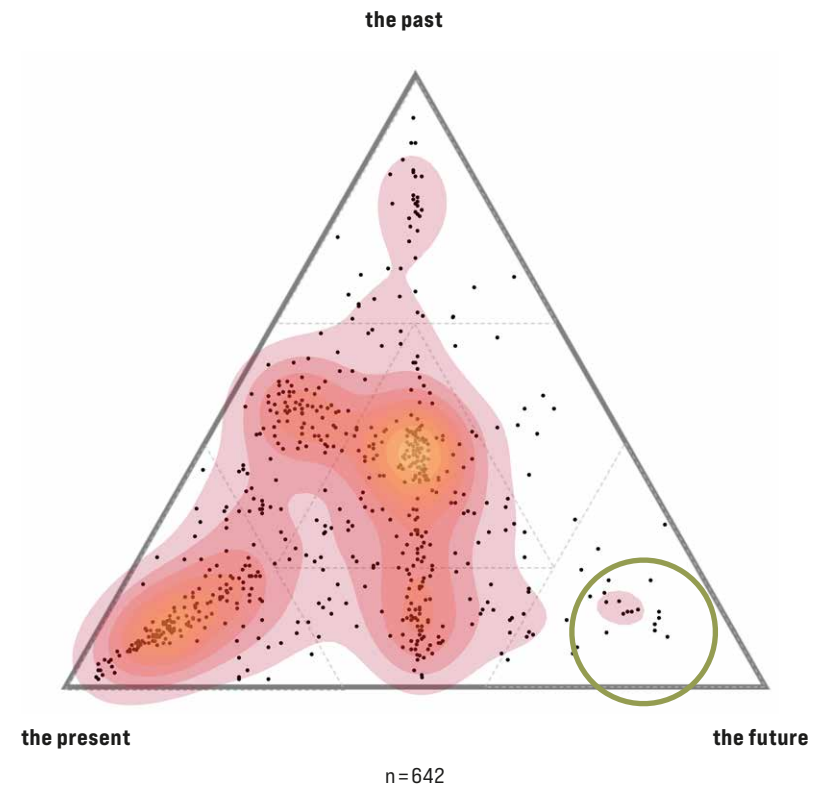
Within the triad "past – present – future", it is noticeable that there are hardly any future-oriented stories. The few stories that are located at the "future" pole indicate the possibility of a felt connectedness. They express the hope that complexity, tensions, and emotions can be honestly and collectively perceived to enable new solutions and creativity to emerge. A particular micro-narrative is represented by "Our democracy on an icy sea", which exemplifies the interconnectedness of current crises, democratic processes, unconscious fears, and the German past, to be analyzed in detail on the next page, where significant statements are highlighted.

**The creation of a new story — using the example of the story "Our democracy on an icy sea"**

*"I had a* **nightmare** *tonight. Old fears of failure were fully activated again. I traced them. Memories came to me of my* **escape in January 1945 from Gdynia (Gotenhafen) by ship to the West with my parents.** *We sailed with three smaller ships in a convoy because of the danger of mines. One of the ships ran into a mine, sank, and the people (refugees like us) sat on ice floes in the icy sea as far as they could still save themselves. I was only told this, but I remember a sea of women in their pink underwear sitting close together in one room of our ship. I remember great excitement and searching for doctors. After that we all had to vacate our bunks and wear life jackets for the whole of the rest of the trip for over a week, which I thought was awful. I remember being aware of the danger of our ship running into a mine as a possibility too.* **But I don't remember being afraid of it.** *This has amazed me now as I retrace my nightmare. I wasn't afraid of such a real danger?* **I must have repressed it even then."**

This narrative suggests, that formerly repressed fear is activated by the event and surfaces into consciousness in the form of a nightmare. Through the group process, the fear can no longer be repressed.

*"That fear seemed to have awakened me now with my nightmare and after the issues we addressed yesterday. And I connected it with my fear that vaccine sceptics to contrarians give me* *when they – in my perception – confidently report that they have withdrawn their trust from our democracy.* **And that this scares me to death: because we don't have a better democracy after all!** *For me it is like [person x; anonymized by authors] said in her example of the marriage dispute: If we question the whole thing, where do we want to go?"*

On closer reflection, the participant becomes aware of how the fear of that time is reflected in the fear of vaccination sceptics and the disintegration of democracy. The time level of the historical event of the flight is mixed with the current social crisis/challenge of the vaccination discussion.

*"I've now been able to integrate that into my memory from our escape.* *The ship became our democracy on icy seas, we have to take people in and we don't have a solution to the fact that we can't take them all in, and then the whole endangered ship is called into question as well.* **I was able to connect with my fear now.** *Yes, that's how it is.* **But I also now understand the fear of abuse of power that drives the sceptics as a lesson from the 3rd Reich.** *And I sense in myself the potential to hold that somehow. That in mutual recognition of our fears, we could help create a more sustainable society. That this might be an option."*

Through the perception of fear and its origin, flight becomes a metaphor and a symbol of an endangered democracy. It is no longer the anti-vaccinationist per se who represents a danger. The fear of an abuse of power can now be understood and empathically perceived. Through resonance, more personal inner space is created and social polarization is reduced.
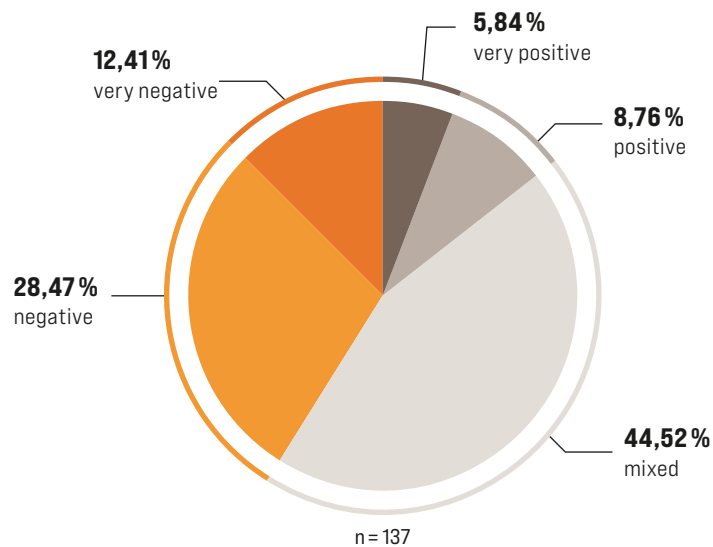
## II.   Before and after comparisons

The following representations compare micro-stories written before and at the beginning of the trauma-informed large group process (period 4/21/22–4/28/22) with narratives entered at the end and up to 7 days after the event (period 5/1/22–5/8/22). Thus, we compare the totality of stories generated during these time periods; these may be from the same or different participants. The aim here is not so much to compare the before and after of individual participants, but to see how the narrative landscapes change before and after the group process. We present eight before and after comparisons.
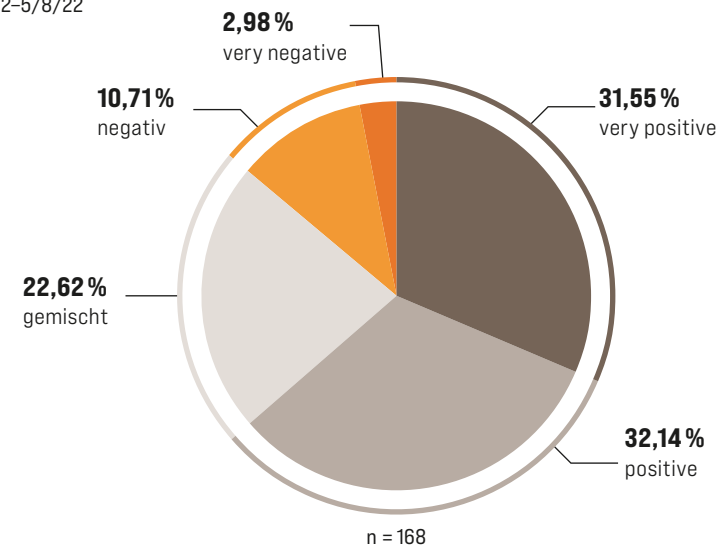
### 1: Positive-negative evaluation of the stories

The before and after comparison of the participants' evaluations of the micro-narratives using the categories "positive" and "negative" shows a clear difference: Before the event, well over half of the micro-narratives were evaluated as very negative, negative and mixed. After the group process, over half of the micro-narratives were rated as very positive, positive and mixed.

## MY STORY IS …

**Participants' evaluation of their story**

Before  4/21/22–4/28/22



5,84 % very positive

8,76 % positive

44,52 % mixed

28,47 % negative

12,41 % very negative

n = 137

After  5/1/22–5/8/22



2,98 % very negative

31,55 % very positive

32,14 % positive

22,62 % gemischt

10,71 % negativ

n = 168

**2: Triad "'triggered', activated — numb, hopeless — engaged, curious"**
In this comparison, before the event the distribution of stories within the triad is quite balanced. The bright center of concentration tends slightly toward the "'triggered', activated" and "numb, hopeless" axes. After the group process, most stories are at the "engaged, curious" pole. This suggests that many participants gained an altered experience of self and relationship through the large group process, which goes hand in hand with increased self-efficacy. Confidence in the possibility and meaningfulness of participating in democratic processes and spaces dominates the narratives. Qualities such as relationship work, active listening and the creation of a safe space within democratic processes, are experienced as meaningful and efficient. Stories similar to those listed below are found there.

**IN MY STORY I FEEL …**



n=159

**IN MY STORY I FEEL …**



n=136
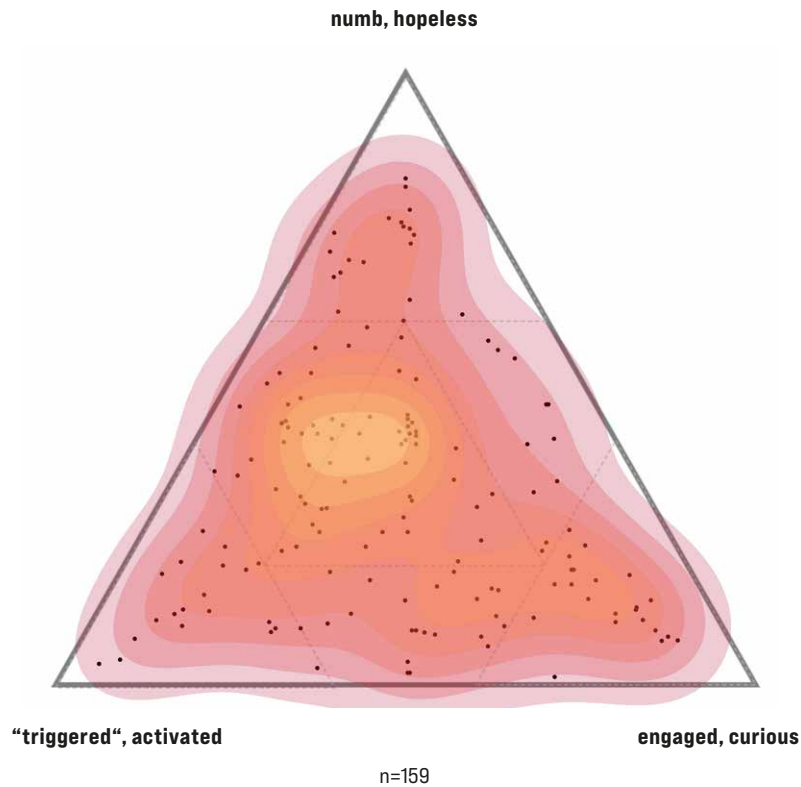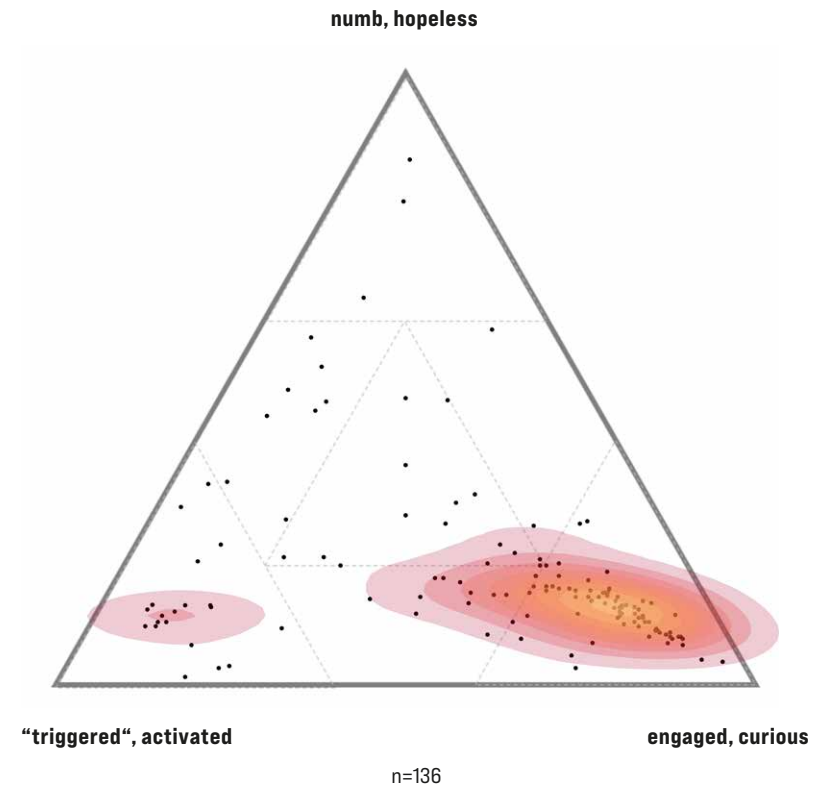
**Reflection – May 5, 2022** *Democracy is relational work — this statement changes the way I relate to democracy, it becomes more concrete, tangible and shapeable. I have come to the interesting realization that the training I offer is political work. It develops democratic ability and democratic competence. It has become clear to me once again how important it is to include "inner work" in the state education system. I was fascinated and deeply touched by how openly inner worlds were expressed in the seminar. I have been working with trauma and its healing for a long time. Since the workshop I can see and feel the collective trauma layers much more clearly. Healing is possible! There are still many felt realizations that I cannot yet put into words. My confidence has grown that together we can build a house in which we want to live.*

**Vision – May 6, 2022** *Amazing: When it came to collecting important points in a small group that are conducive to democracy, one of the points that came up for me was one that is very close to my heart. As I listened to the others, I became so immersed in their storytelling that I became temporarily unaware of myself and later forgot to mention this important point. Near the end of our time, as we were silently reflecting for a moment, one participant said she had just remembered something important and brought up the very point I had forgotten to mention. Could it be that in sensing the "deep space of the we", we are able to transcend the (supposed) boundaries between us, and also take in and express the unspoken of the other people in that space? What a chance for a "democracy of the future"…*

**Us – May 5, 2022** *I experienced this weekend how active listening and compassionate listening allow a space to emerge where we can face each other in openness in a very quick time. Intimacy emerges. The fact that it happens so quickly shows me that when a certain space is created, you can avoid the detour of discussion and cantankerousness and go straight to each other. A second important experience, is that where we can meet each other in this way, we help each other to feel trauma, to disclose it and at the same time to be in a healing energy. This is very valuable and also efficient.*
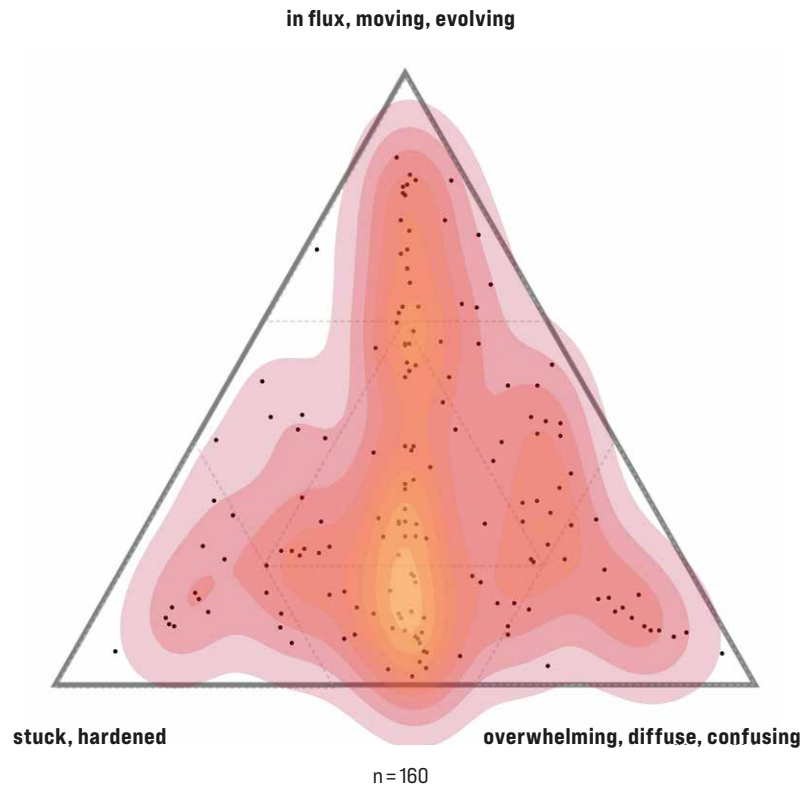
**IN MY STORY I FEEL …**



numb, hopeless

"triggered", activated

engaged, curious

n=136
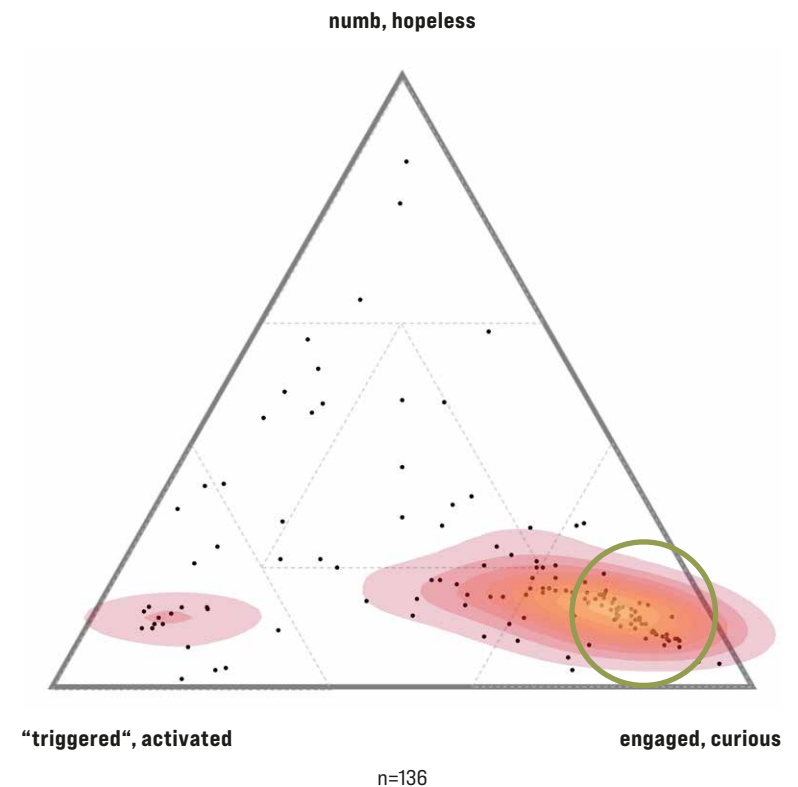
**3: Triad "stuck, hardened — overwhelming, diffuse, confusing — in flux, moving, evolving"**

Even with the triad "stuck, hardened – overwhelming, diffuse, confusing – in flux, evolving", the distribution of narratives in the pre-event period is quite balanced. Thus, many stories are found in the center area towards "in flux, moving, evolving". Another center extends downward from the middle of the triad. Thus, at the beginning of the large group process, over 15 stories are found between the poles of "stuck, hardened" and "overwhelming, diffuse, confusing". Speechlessness, fear and anxiety about the democratic structures as well as the loss of connection are often mentioned in these stories.

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE THE SITUATION AS ...**



in flux, moving, evolving

stuck, hardened

overwhelming, diffuse, confusing

n = 160

in flux, moving, evolving

stuck, hardened

overwhelming, diffuse, confusing

n = 145
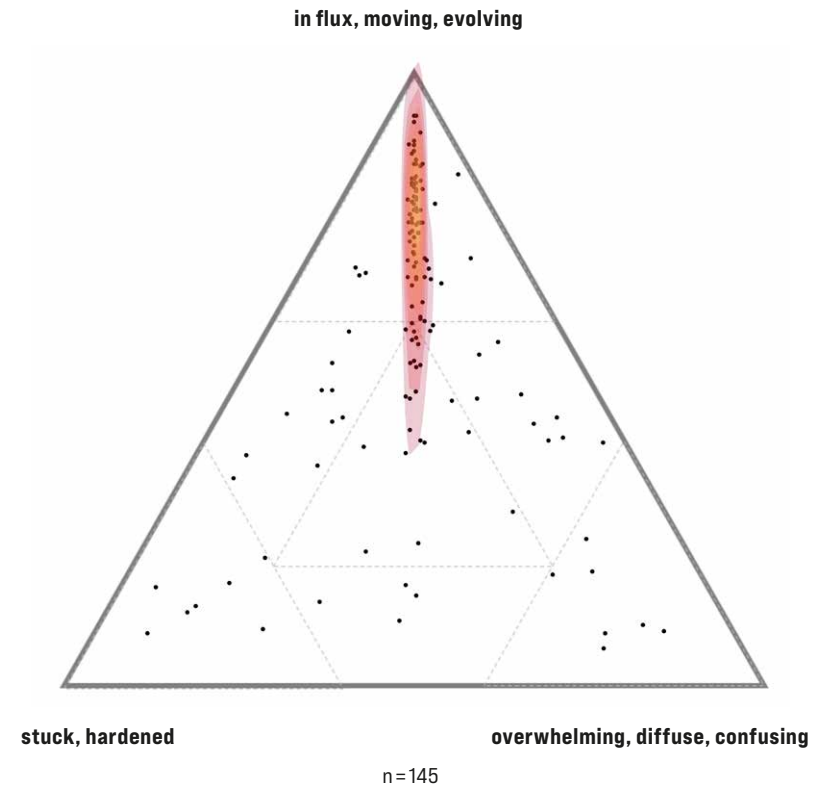
Very clearly, the stories after the group process shift towards the axis "in flow, moving, evolving". This is certainly related to the "post-work-shop euphoria" of the participants, which is also clearly expressed in the micro-stories. In addition, many experience how the joint process awakens new potential and scope for action in terms of social engagement. Many participants seem to draw new courage and strength for their social participation and the further development of democracy through the intensive confrontation with very personal, traumatic experiences. Here, stories like those displayed to the right are found:

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE THE SITUATION AS …**



in flux, moving, evolving

stuck, hardened

overwhelming, diffuse, confusing

n = 145
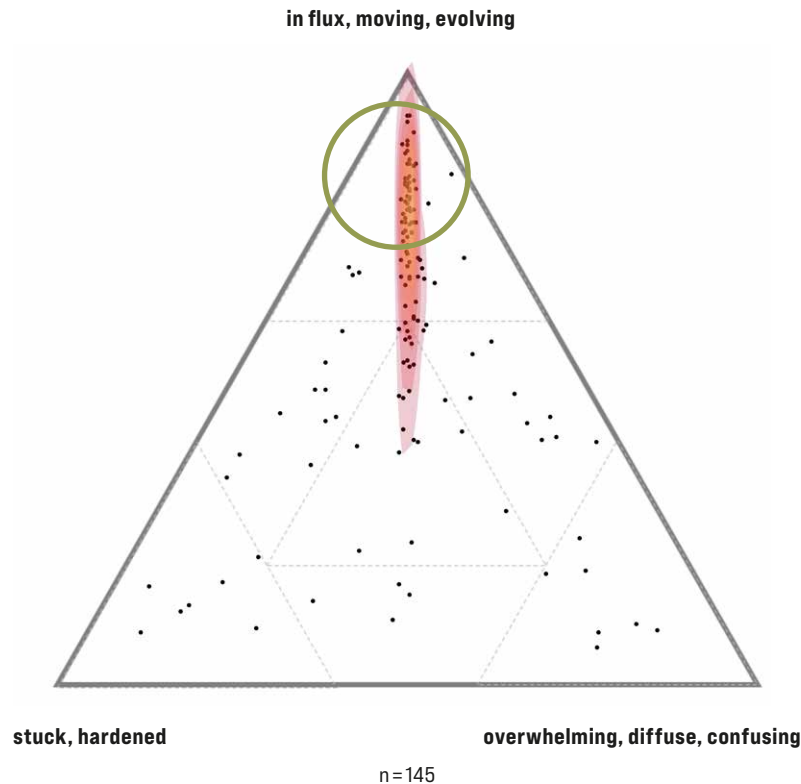
**Seeing potential – May 5, 2022**  *I suddenly see "citizens" more often in people I meet (not just acquaintances, but also those I happen to walk behind on the sidewalk, for example, or who serve me in a store). Fellow citizens. Fellow humans, too. The thought just flashes up, unasked, unsolicited.*
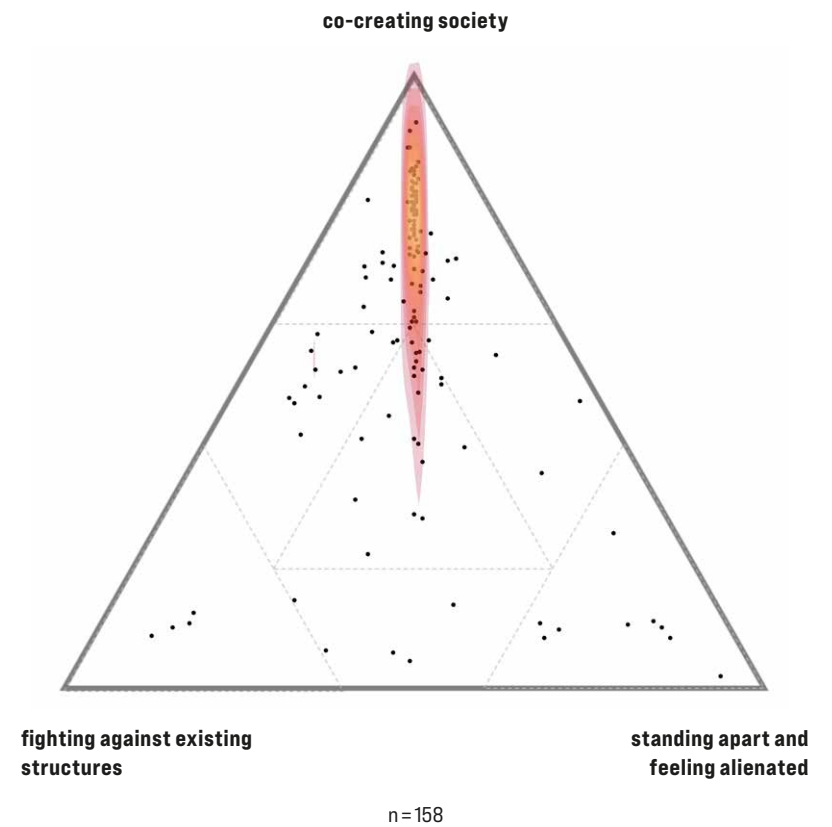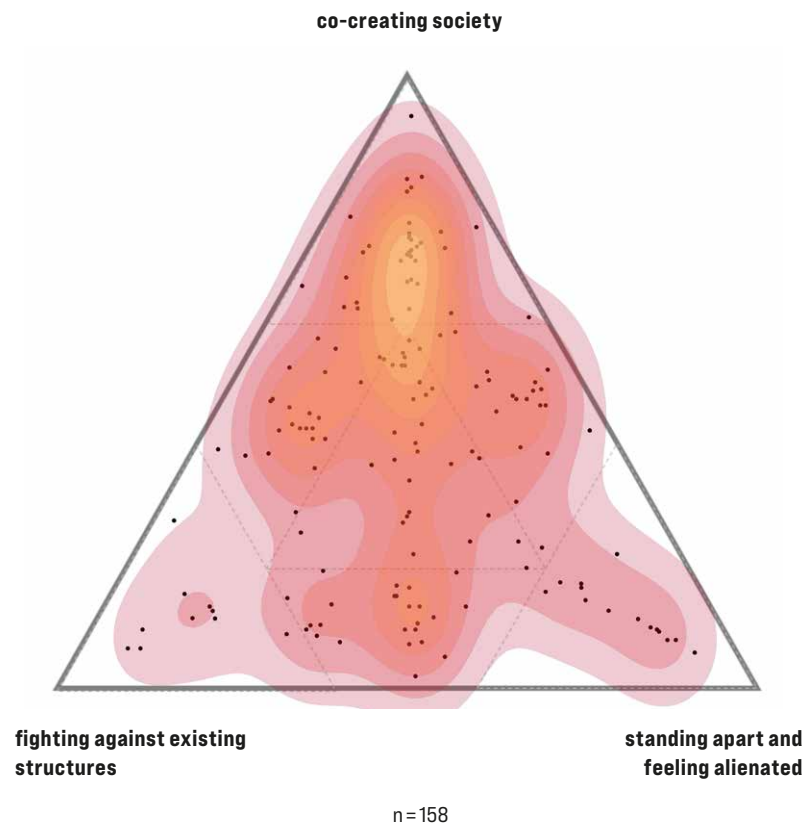
**Digestive spaces – May 3, 2022**  *I attended an amazing workshop on collective trauma this past weekend. My husband also attended it and we are amazed at how our own history is intertwined with democracy in the country and impacts each other. Independently of us, we discovered a woman who will give a workshop in our [event x; anonymized by authors]. She was also impressed by the encounters and feels addressed. On Sunday evening we decided together to offer the workshop as a prototype for a "digestive space" of the last 2 years. We want to gain experience and add it to our existing knowledge and skills. We have already successfully tried out conversation rooms in different variations. Now our concern is to link these projects with Mehr Demokratie. My heart beats for offering outside of the weekend a conversation space around the campfire in the garden (or also in the rooms) for people from health care, education and politics. If we can complement it with elements of embodiment and add a short silence now and then, it will have a relieving effect.*

**4: Triad "fighting against structures — shaping society co-creatively — standing apart and feeling alienated"**
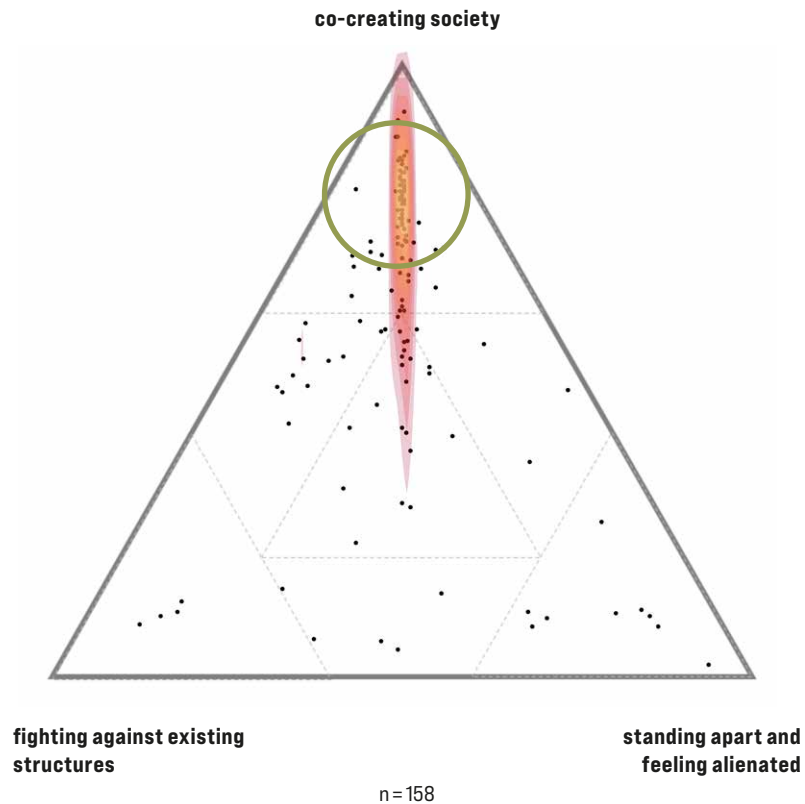
The distribution of stories within the triad at the time before the large group process, is also shown here to be quite balanced. The light center of concentration tends towards the axis "shaping our society co-creatively".

**REFLECTING MY STORY, I EXPERIENCE MYSELF AS SOMEONE WHO IS ...**

co-creating society



fighting against existing
structures

standing apart and
feeling alienated

n = 158

**REFLECTING MY STORY, I EXPERIENCE MYSELF AS SOMEONE WHO IS ...**

co-creating society



fighting against existing
structures

standing apart and
feeling alienated

n = 158

**REFLECTING MY STORY, I EXPERIENCE MYSELF AS SOMEONE WHO IS …**

co-creating society



fighting against existing
structures

standing apart and
feeling alienated

n = 158

**Give voice to the silent – May 2, 2022** *In political discussions, I almost always tend to fall silent. Then in my head (especially if one or more people at the discussion are arguing very persuasively, eloquently) these scenes play out: "I'm not well enough prepared/informed on this topic", "the others know much more", "no one cares about my opinion". When I say something, I have the fear in the back of my mind, "you're bound to get cut off, the others are going to roll over you". Through the weekend with Thomas and especially also the special listening way in the dyads and triads I feel: I also have something to say, my opinion also counts and is important for others. It gives me the feeling that there is a large space of ideas and knowledge that is cut off by the often violent nature of discussions, which can first be discovered by myself and then also by the others.*

**Shifting mindfulness in encounters – May 5, 2022** *Since the workshop, I have noticed how I am once again significantly more mindful of other people. A greater awareness has developed in me of how a person's past history determines his/her present existence. As a result, I can feel more benevolence and clearly withdraw my judgments/assessments. At the same time, I am more open to receiving what my counterparts want to/can show of themselves. Overall, this makes it easier for me to be present, to listen empathically and to be compassionate.*

As visible in the triad above, after the large group process the stories are very much concentrated at the pole "shaping our society co-creatively". This is certainly due to the positive group experience of many participants within the event. Many stories describe how empathic listening and shared presence enabled a new form of political exchange. Three micro-stories help illustrate this:

**Connectedness – May 5, 2022** *I have experienced how we have grown together as a group — noticing, sensing, listening, sharing, exploring together and classifying our experiences and experiencing how they are meaningful to everyone's learning. In general, I pay more attention to feeling my counterpart(s) and thus building a connection, letting connectedness develop. For me, this is the prerequisite for creative exchange, for opening up and tackling problems together, for building democracy together.*

**5: Triad "past — present — future"**

For the triad "past – present – future", the distribution of the stories changes only slightly in the before and after comparison. After the event, slightly fewer stories are found at the "present" pole. Due to the focus of the large group process on the traces of traumatic memory, it is not surprising that after the process there are slightly more stories at the "past" pole.

**MY STORY RELATES TO …**



n = 161

**MY STORY RELATES TO …**



n = 161
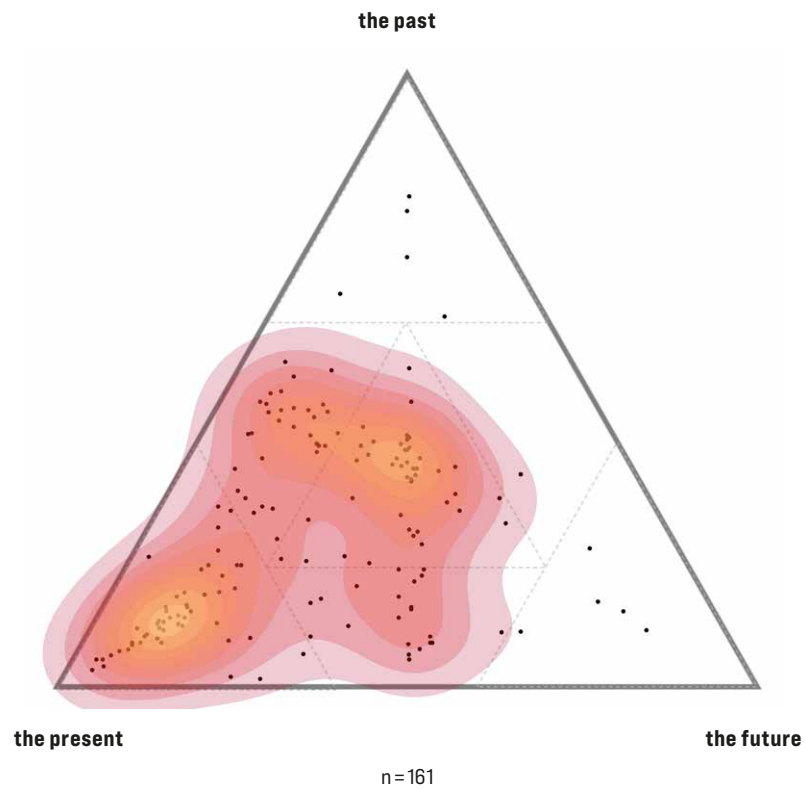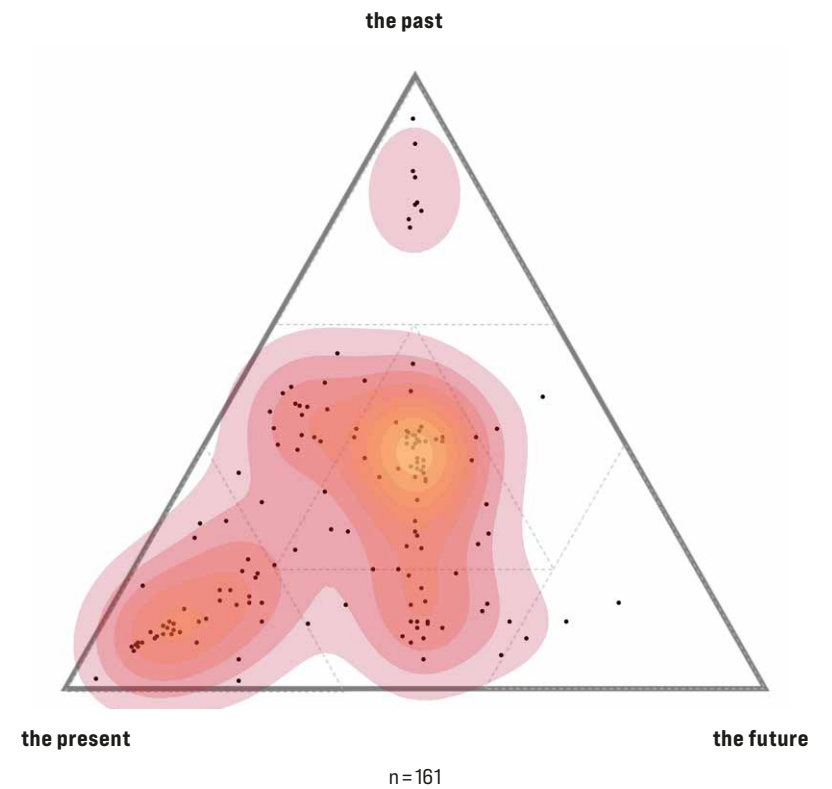
**6: Dyad "near — far away"**
The before and after comparison of the dyads similarly illustrates the changes in the narrative landscape during the course of the large group process. In dyads, the participants locate their stories in a field of tension between two concepts or states.

In the first dyad, participants rated the extent to which they experience other people in their story as "close" or "far away".

The two diagrams show clearly that the narrative landscape is located more on the "far away" side before the group process. This suggests that the participants felt a greater distance from others at the beginning of the process. A clear shift towards "close" is shown by the stories in the before and after comparison, which indicates that the participants felt more closeness after the large group process. Many stories are more personal, deal with the experiences made in the group and express a new quality of contact.

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE OTHERS AS …**



n = 151

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE OTHERS AS …**



n = 136
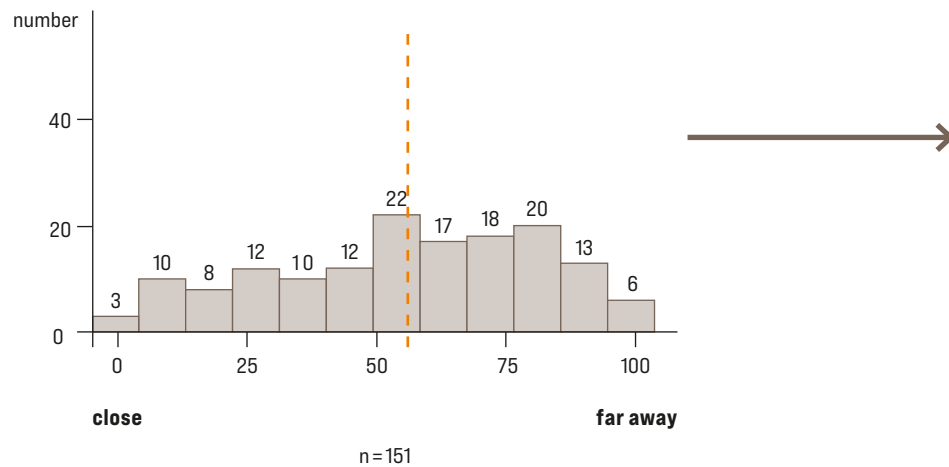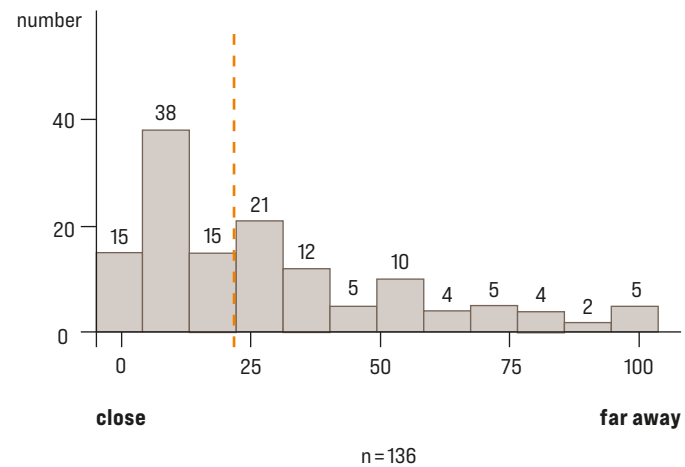
## 7: Dyad "polarization/division — compassion/coherence"

In the following dyad, participants located their micro-stories between the poles of "polarization and division" and "compassion and coherence". While before the trauma-informed large group process the average of the stories lies between the two poles, after the event the average shifts significantly towards the pole "compassion and coherence". Again, it appears that the narrative landscape after the group process is dominated by significantly more positive stories, which is likely due to the deep resonance experience of many participants.

**MY STORY CREATES MORE ...**



n = 121

**MY STORY CREATES MORE ...**



n = 137
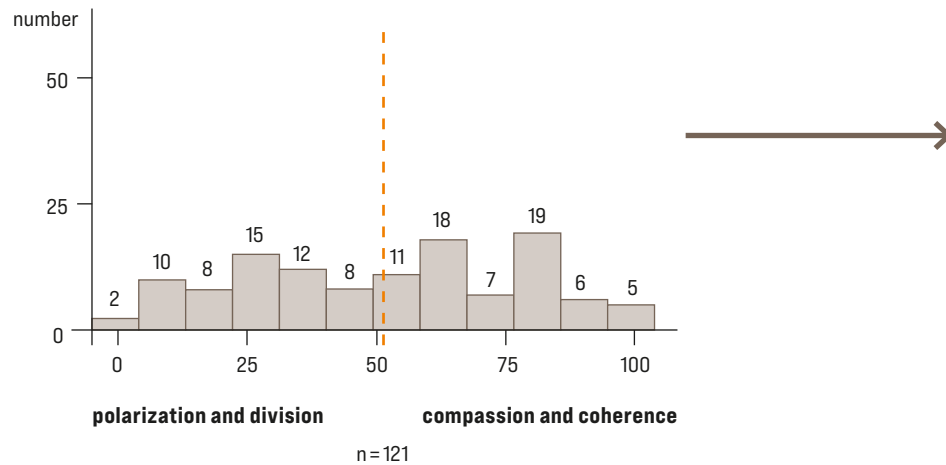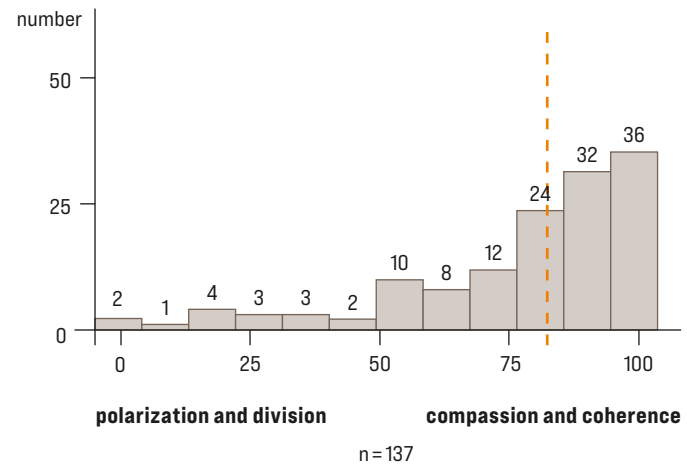
**8: Dyad "responsible/appropriate — irresponsible/inappropriate"**
The before and after comparison of the participants' assessment of the extent to which society's response to crises is perceived as "responsible/appropriate" or "irresponsible/inappropriate" in their narratives shows a clear shift in the narrative landscape towards "responsible/appropriate". Whereas prior to the trauma-informed large group process, significantly more stories viewed our society's response as "irresponsible, inappropriate", the number of stories in which the society's response was deemed "responsible, appropriate" increased.

**IN MY STORY I PERCEIVE SOCIETY'S RESPONSE AS ...**

number

40

20

0

2   3   3   3   8   12   17   20   18   11   12

0   25   50   75   100

**responsible, appropriate**          **irresponsible, inappropriate**

n = 109

**IN MY STORY I PERCEIVE SOCIETY'S RESPONSE AS ...**

number

40

20

0

1   12   2   4   3   9   8   9   6   7   6   7

0   25   50   75   100

**responsible, appropriate**          **irresponsible, inappropriate**

n = 74
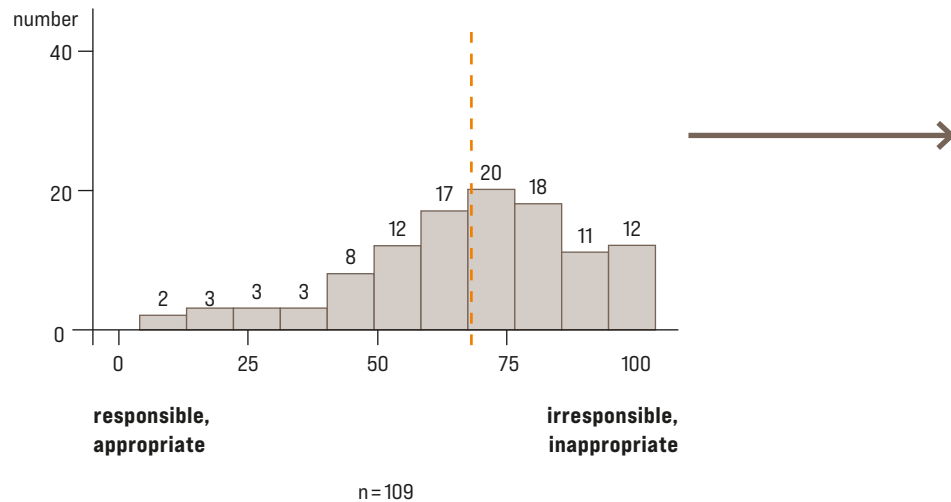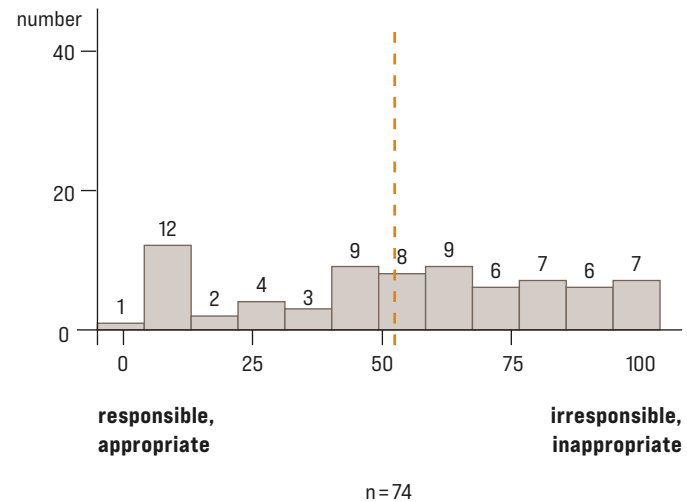
### III. Change in the stories of individual participants in the course of the group process

In the following evaluation section, we focus on selected participants who entered several stories into the SenseMaker over the entire period of the trauma-informed large group process. The aim is to trace the change in the positioning of the stories in selected triads. The stories and dots in the following graphs are from the same person. An arrow connecting the dots illustrates the timing of the stories entered.

**First process of a participant: From powerlessness to creative chaos to new hope**

**IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE THE SITUATION AS …**

in flux, moving, evolving
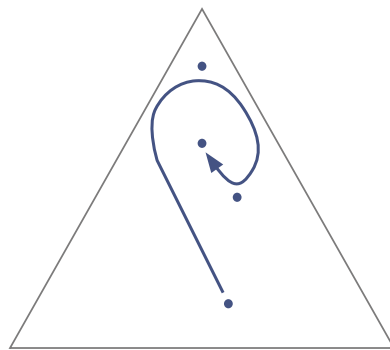


stuck,
hardened

overwhelming,
diffuse, confusing

**Narrative 1: Powerlessness, change and attention – April 29, 2022** *Everything is very confusing and scary; I sometimes feel like the familiar world view that used to change relatively slowly is changing into a pixel resolution, there are already many empty spots, the new ones are not there yet or not recognizable, the speed, the target and the influenceability of the change -> unclear. On the other hand, an important attention grows.*

**Narrative 2: Democracy goes through insecurities – April 29, 2022** *I was just at a highly interesting seminar on collective trauma and its relation to society and democracy. A beneficial and enlightening experience in which it became clear how important such opening processes in the world are for people. I experienced the tragic significance of people not being heard and the importance of everyone being allowed to say what they like within the framework of society, according to certain protective rules, and thus being given a listening space and efficacy. Also efficacy for development — for everyone. Because in this way the diversity which lies within us and which makes our lives alive and worth living and loving is allowed to appear. This is how trust can arise.*
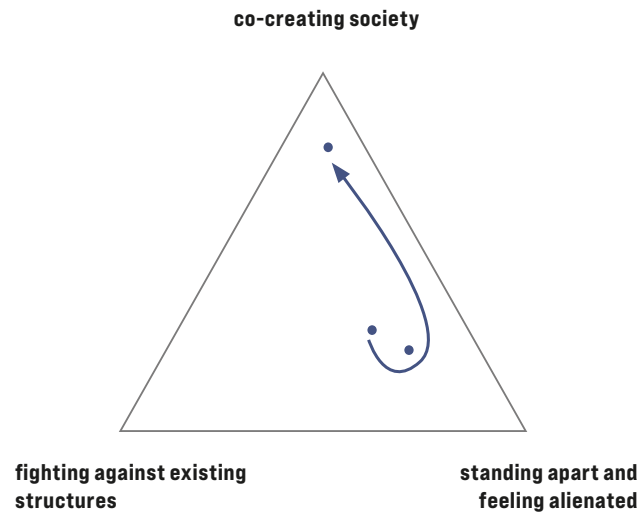
**Narrative 3: Creative chaos – April 30, 2022** *There's a lot of clutter, chaos behind the fragile facades — there are many paths, many aberrations, many spot landings. I miss my clear thread. What I endured a moment ago is unbearable again shortly afterwards from a different perspective — then leads again to an extraordinarily important learning experience, etc.*

**Narrativ 4: Dream democracy – May 1, 2022** *This weekend I had a miraculous experience! I have been thinking for a long time that it should become common to tell about trauma in society as well, to get into conversation about it — only how, that was the question. Now I was able to participate in a workshop that links democracy (i.e. a political, supposedly sober instrument) with trauma. In such a way that the people who want to live democracy and their experiences and pains, which have arisen through confusions and mistakes (of politics, of fellow human beings, of one's own handling of past experiences), become visible. New constructive connections between fellow human beings emerged and with them new ways of looking at necessities in the world and in us, of planning new ways of dealing with things and decision-making cultures. The result gives me hope that now more and more ways (exponential growth in the right place!) will emerge in which these experiences can be lived and passed on. In such a way that the waves of knowledge behind these experiences continue to spread. Possibly someday even penetrate into the spaces of those poor people who so far "have to" manipulate the world out of sheer ignorance, possibly out of unresolved traumas/attachment disorders, and lonely abuse of power. And this is how the human change happens!*

The first story clearly shows the overwhelming demand and the feeling of powerlessness of the author; as confirmed by the positioning of the story between "stuck, hardened" and "overwhelming, diffuse, confusing". As the group process begins, this changes and joy arises about the possibility of sharing and being heard – experienced as building trust. The positioning of the second story in the triad is clearly visible at the pole "in flow, moving, developing". The day after, the group process seems to be at the forefront of the story; the participant describes it as "creative chaos". This is reflected by the positioning between "in flux, moving, evolving" and "overwhelming, diffuse, confusing". On the last day of the event, gratitude and joy about the process is expressed. The positioning here moves away from "overwhelming, diffuse, confusing" to "in flux, moving, evolving". In summary: the individual process moves from powerlessness to joy about what was experienced in the large group, and then further to being overwhelmed by the deepened process work. At the end of the large group process, a new hope emerges in the context of democracy and trauma.

**Second individual process: from the question of democracy to democracy as a relationship**

**REFLECTING MY STORY, I EXPERIENCE MYSELF AS SOMEONE WHO IS …**

co-creating society



fighting against existing
structures

standing apart and
feeling alienated

**Narrative 1: Democracy is …? – April 21, 2022**  *I feel powerless. Democracy is somehow not where I am. When we talk to each other, either affirmation of my opinion or yours takes place, or incomprehension. Too quickly we are at the first opinions for which it is necessary to find majorities, more votes. I worry because we — especially now in the tension between East and West — are so quick to define and condemn those who think differently. That is my experience.*

**Narrative 2: Creating peace – without weapons! Just ONE strategy? – April 29, 2022**
*Now (after the first meditation) I feel my fear of not being able to be what our democratic construct (or the group I am in right now) expects of me. I also feel my expectation of others to please be what I need them to be — so that I can have confidence. My concern is for the wrong path; as if I can/would walk it without feeling it is the wrong one. Not trusting me in my being and suchness. I feel my not-being-connected-with-me. That makes being together exhausting for me. Being alone gives me more space. How can I, with my isolation and fear/worry, talk about bike lanes in a gathering of citizens and find solutions to the conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and drivers, less $CO_2$ and more space for being human and being together? Talking about the war in Ukraine, about my fear of us getting involved in the war when I think we can go down wrong paths that cause really, really bad things. Doing the right thing at the moment without following my strategy (making peace without weapons) in fixed ways (by polarizing, seeking majorities)? Being in touch with those who have other strategies?*

**Narrative 3: Democracy is relationship – April 29, 2022**  *Now I would say that I have hope again. That democracy makes sense. That good living together is possible when all our feelings are allowed to be there. That it's nice to listen to each other, to give space to feelings, stories and experiences and to see a person in the middle of it from whom I can learn. That I do wish so much our everyday life would be like this day and I would resolve our conflicts as a matter of course with the people in my place. That my confidence cushion keeps replenishing itself so that strength, creativity, hope and love flow into the development of our togetherness. Democracy is relationship.*

In the sequence of stories presented here, democracy is perceived as absent by the author before the large group process. The feeling of powerlessness dominates the first micro-story. As reflected by the positioning of the story close to the pole "standing apart and feeling alienated" the participant feels like an outsider. In the second story, which in contrast to the first story is evaluated as mixed, the feeling of alienation intensifies. Anxiety and disconnectedness with oneself become palpable. As the story progresses, hope and a sense of purpose emerge in relation to democracy. Democracy thereby is perceived less as an abstract idea but more as a tangible experience. become palpable. As the story progresses, hope and a sense of purpose emerge in relation to democracy. Democracy thereby is perceived less as an abstract idea but more as a tangible experience.

**Third individual process: From confusion to the feeling of fear**

IN MY STORY I EXPERIENCE THE SITUATION AS ...

in flux, moving, evolving

stuck,
hardened

overwhelming,
diffuse, confusing
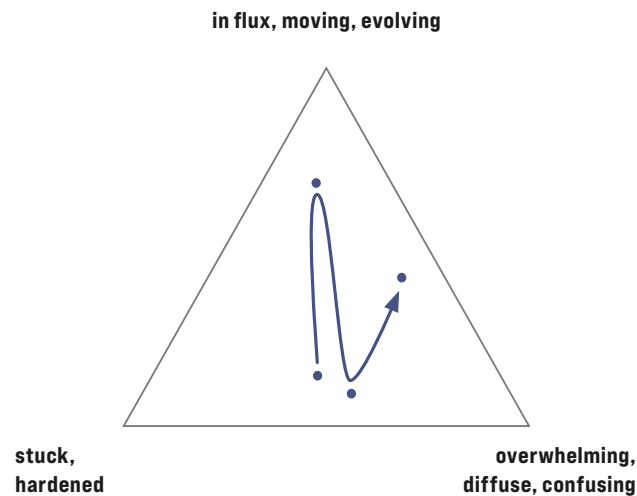
In the third individual course there are a total of four stories, which were entered before, during and after the group process. The first story expresses the strong confusion (also the title of the story) about the different perspectives on current crises. The micro-story is located pretty much exactly between the poles of "stuck, hardened" and "overwhelming, diffuse, confusing". In the second story, an impulse to flee is formulated in view of the delivery of arms to Ukraine. In addition, there is mention of the grandmother whose husband and sons fought in World War II. The author of the story describes that he/she can now feel the grandmother's fear. Interestingly, this story is significantly closer to the pole "in flux, moving, evolving".

This suggests that the emotions previously triggered by the war in Ukraine are closely interwoven with the grandmother's transgenerational fear, which presumably could not be felt at the time and is only being felt now. Thomas Hübl speaks here of a "thawing", through which painful emotions that could not be perceived and expressed at the time of creation can be experienced again. In the third story "In the year 2022", excessive demands and powerlessness are again felt; the perceived division caused by the Corona vaccination policy, the war in Ukraine, climate change and reflections on democracy emerge in it. It is therefore not surprising that this story locates itself between the poles of "stuck, hardened" and "overwhelming, diffuse, confusing", with a slight tendency towards the latter pole. In the fourth and final story, entered a few days after the event, the participant notes that the great disorientation he/she experienced is also due to his/her biographical background. He/she realizes that he/she cannot cognitively confront the activated feeling of disorientation, but must turn to meet his/her own fear. The location is now between the pole "in flux, moving, evolving" and "overwhelming, diffuse, confusing". The following shows the four stories.

**Narrative 1: Grandmother's fear – April 29, 2022** *I have been terrified of expansion of war since the decision was made that weapons would be supplied. I have a husband and three grown sons. I have been so afraid; I would like that all five of us leave the country. During the lunch break, my grandma came to my mind. Her husband and three sons were soldiers in World War II. I felt their desperation and fear.*

**Narrative 2: Confusion – April 21, 2022** *The worst thing for me is the loss of trust; I don't know which reports to believe. The news, the critical media. I'm afraid of being on the wrong side and don't position myself at all; that doesn't put me anywhere. This has made me dissatisfied.*

**Narrative 3: In the year 2022 – April 29, 2022** *I was made to think by the statement that democracy is only possible through relationship, not through singularization of ministries that do not exchange. Is this fact the explanation that there is a great divide between the vaccinated and the unvaccinated, that there is only opinion, no listening and understanding of the fears of others? Is that why I stand in line, with tears in my eyes, to get vaccinated? My fear of the vaccination is greater than my fear of the disease. That doesn't count at my work, that's where the fear of the virus reigns supreme, stoked by the media, over and over again. It doesn't stop. Yes it did, it stopped when the next crisis hit in a nearby country, war! Corona faded into the background, everyone rushed to the war that was so close. Again anxiety and numbness, powerlessness and fear. These two crises against a backdrop of environmental degradation that is often not taken seriously. We*

*treat our habitat as we ourselves never want to be treated! Planet Earth will eventually regenerate, we humans will not survive this and will be exposed to many more catastrophes before certain death. Is this the just punishment for a species without responsibility and feeling?*

**Narrative 4: Emotional understanding – May 5, 2022** *I have experienced great disorientation in the Corona period and have tried to overcome it by even seeking for more information. Thus, to meet it cognitively, which I did not succeed in doing; I could not make up my mind. Over the weekend I realized that I knew this feeling of disorientation very well as a child and I suffered a lot from it. I always had to decide for myself at an early age, my father had died very young and my mother never took a stand. There was no reliance on the outside, it offered me no direction or guidance. I am glad to understand the situation better now. I cannot cognitively confront this old activated feeling, but [have to turn] towards it.*

# Concluding discussion

# 5 Concluding discussion

At this point, we bring together the insights of the different parts of the analysis to shed light on our initial question: *Can an understanding of and a more conscious approach to collective trauma dynamics help strengthen our democracy and overcome polarization?*

During the course of the analysis, it became clear that the research question cannot be answered conclusively. A clear-cut, concise conclusion can neither do justice to the process of sensemaking nor to the magnitude and complexity of the topic of trauma and democracy. Nevertheless, a number of overarching observations can be derived from the available data and some trends can be formulated that provide valuable insights with regard to the guiding question. Building on this, we provide an outlook for possible next steps in politics, societal practice, and scholarship.

## 5.1 Overarching observations

First and foremost, looking at the SenseMaker results makes it obvious that participants increasingly shared stories towards the end of the trauma-informed large group process,

- which they themselves consider to be positive,
- where they feel more connected to the people around them,
- which are written out of a sense of compassion,
- in which they feel society's response to the current crises is appropriate,
- in which they experience themselves as co-creators of society.

The shift in the narrative landscapes outlined above allows the reasoned assessment that the participants' relationship to the lived practice of democracy changes within the framework of the group process. While the stories at the beginning of the process express a good deal of distance and disenchantment with politics, the narrative landscapes at the end of the process testify to a clearly strengthened confidence in one's own ability to act as well as new courage to actively engage in a renewal of democratic practice. In the course of the group process abstract systems such as politics, participation, democracy and society can be experienced by the participants more directly, in a more manageable, accessible and lively way.

This observation is confirmed and supplemented by the insights from the focus groups and the participatory observation. A comparative analysis of the focus groups shows that participants tend to describe numerous additional qualities and competencies as important for dealing democratically with multiple crises after the large group process. In addition to the social structures and institutions previously named as important, as well as the ability to communicate with each other with respect for diversity and differences in opinion, the competencies of forming relationships with oneself and others as well as dialogical communication are increasingly named. This can be understood as an appreciation of the communication elements practiced in the group process (see Chapter 3.3). The desire to participate in democracy and the positive assessment of corresponding self-efficacy also increase significantly.

Furthermore, the participatory observation affirmed the well-founded assessment that topics previously experienced as "frozen", difficult or highly emotional became more accessible and workable in the group process. The process seems to have enabled many participants to gain a deeper resonance experience with their own experience and the experience of others with regard to massive crises and past traumatic experiences. Thus, the findings from the focus groups and participatory observation support the analyses of the narrative landscapes.

## 5.2 Trends

Based on these overarching observations and incorporating the diverse, detailed information from the stories, the following trends can be identified at the intersection of collective trauma dynamics, democracy and polarization. The overall picture that emerges suggests that the large group process under consideration can counteract polarizing tendencies.

### Trend 1 — Interaction of past injuries and present crisis experience

**Within the group process a more conscious perception and a new understanding of the manifold links between personal injuries, collective memory contents and present crisis experience emerge.**

Research findings indicate that the trauma-informed approach creates a heightened and refined awareness of how personal injuries and painful experiences shape ("in-form") our relationship to the world, to society, to other people today. In this grey zone between history, memory and the present what takes place is what the psychoanalyst Volkan calls a "time collapse": *"What is remembered from the past, felt now and expected for the future comes together in a time collapse"* (Volkan 1999, p. 200). Here, the personal injuries and blind spots from one's own biography meet traumatizing events in the collective memory, which are not consciously integrated into society through practices of remembering as well as not communicated linguistically. Crisis situations require that the past, present and future are in connection so that *"people [create] a coherent, plausible, and acceptable narrative in order to reach agreement on needed changes"* (Leipprand 2018, p. 217, own translation). This includes consciously turning to repressed personal and collective traumatic content. As participants become jointly and mindfully aware of the multiple

links between emotional memories, collective memory content and present crisis experience, a deeper understanding of one's own becoming and that of others emerges. This enables an expanded basis for compassion and relatedness.

### Trend 2 — Experiencing a sense of purpose

**Within the large group process, the participants' sensemaking and meaning-making change in such a way that they express more commitment, motivation and responsibility in the context of democracy.**

The shift in narratives makes it clear that shared sensemaking has taken place within the trauma-informed large group process, and has had a very positive impact on participants. A large number of the stories after the large group process are about the participants experiencing themselves as more motivated and more effective in terms of democratic co-creation. The stories speak of freshness and creativity; participants formulate new ideas on how they can usefully and effectively incorporate their personal competencies and life experiences into democratic participation. The more differentiated view of crises and polarization that emerges within the group process enables an attitude of curiosity about positions that are alien to one's own. This expands the ability of a more complex, comprehensive sensemaking and thus of orientation and self-motivation in challenging situations. This strengthens the ability to make decisions and take action.

**Trend 3 — Democracy in relationship**

**Participants experience themselves as having a powerful voice and effect when the polyphony of democracy is not experienced purely cognitively, but emotionally and embodied. Democracy then changes from a "thing out there" to an internalized experience of resonance.**

The stories written by the project participants speak of the experience of inclusion in a multi-voiced space. This is evident in the results of the focus groups as well as in the before and after comparison of the triads. Meaning-making is not accomplished purely cognitively, but occurs when we show up in our thinking, feeling, sensing, and core concerns. The "bringing to life" of relationships releases creative potential. Energy formerly bound up in rigidity and detachment can be harnessed to engage with the world in a pleasurable and playful way. In the Cynefin Framework, Snowden describes movement in a complex landscape as a continuous trying-out, experimenting, recognizing, and responding (Snowden, Bonne 2007). In this mode, we can respond to what emerges and continually learn. In the stories, it becomes clear that where we can *"determine ourselves and shape society in this (democratic) way [...] we experience this order as a responding and reacting sphere of resonance"* (Rosa 2016, p. 17, own translation). The stories in this part of the narrative landscape tell how democracy develops from being a "thing out there" to an internalized experience of resonance. It becomes possible to personally, emotionally and situationally position oneself within democracy by way of telling one's own story and listening to and witnessing others. Democracy is then *"a body of sound. A sensual, intellectual and emotional space of understanding"* (Scheub 2017, p. 21, own translation).

**Trend 4 — Strengthening the collective interior space**

**The lived experience of resonance enables a dynamic and connected approach to polarization and conflict. Differences and differing opinions can be better tolerated, from which new response possibilities arise.**

Many of the stories reflect the abruptness of division and the enormous dynamics of social fragmentation in the context of multiple crises. The collective exploration of inner states and reaction patterns, as it takes place in the trauma-informed large group process, enables a structured process of understanding in which different opinions and positions can be held together. *"Not harmony, not unison and not consonance, but processual response, movement, and touch [...]"* (Rosa 2016, p. 369, own translation) characterize such democratic spaces. In them, one's own possibly fixed political position can be understood more deeply, and positions that are alien to one's own can be better perceived and endured. The personal range of possibilities for responding to complex social challenges expands. Defensive reaction patterns, personal activation or inner and outer withdrawal are replaced by a conscious perception of difference, without having to give up relationships. New, related and appropriate ways of responding to personal and societal challenges in the context of crises, become possible – an ability that Thomas Hübl describes as "response-ability".

## 5.3  Outlook

The results of the research project clearly indicate that new formats of democratic practice are helpful in sustainably countering the effects of multiple and dynamic crises. The stresses and uncertainties to which citizens are exposed in the face of the crises require societal spaces in which communicative sensemaking and understanding can take place.
The trauma-informed large group process here points to the possibility of a new kind of politics as well as a new quality of democracy. Going beyond the analyzed process, subsequent conclusions can be drawn:

1. Feelings of division and experiences of separation among citizens should be actively dealt with not only individually, but also socially. This includes, among other things, the divisions caused by the Corona pandemic as well as the unfinished process of coming to terms with the German reunification and the struggle for a common German identity. This helps to strengthen political and social trust, social cohesion and the willingness of citizens to participate.

2. A trauma-sensitive perspective offers the possibility to become more aware of deeper personal and collective dynamics and cross-generational aspects in democratic communication processes. The inner experience of citizens in the context of crises and crisis management can find expression and relatedness here. This fosters connection and empathy among participating citizens and increases the resilience and adaptability of social systems.

3. In order to meet people's need for more opportunities to participate and for greater responsiveness, the further development of democracy should not only refer to formal structures. Rather, investment should be made in enabling social spaces where citizens can experience a culture of dialogue based on connection and where citizens can build relational skills. There is a need for accessible social spaces in which people can come closer to each other through "relationship work" and in which democracy can be experienced in a concrete and living way.

4. The multi-voiced narratives of the project participants show that what citizens understand and expect from democracy is quite diverse. The trauma-informed large group process and the use of the SenseMaker are a promising way to reflect this diversity and make it tangible, while at the same time enabling a shared creation of meaning. The ability to engage in societal dialogue, including on critical issues, is strengthened and polarization can be overcome or at least mitigated.

5. A further implementation of model-like trauma-informed processes on different political levels (municipal, regional, possibly national) seems to us to be particularly relevant as a next step. Here, group processes and the use of the SenseMaker make it possible to explore societal discourses on specific, politically sensitive topics and to work on them together with citizens. In particular, narratives and voices that are often lost in political discourse or remain unconscious are taken into account. This allows to visualize emerging tendencies and lines of conflict early on in the sense of an early warning system. The combination of a trauma-informed process with instruments of deliberative democracy (e.g., citizen participation, citizens' councils), also appears promising.

6. The present project is a first attempt to conduct structured research on a model-like trauma-informed large group process in the context of democracy. Further systematic research on public or semi-public trauma-informed processes is necessary, in order to better understand them in the context of democratic work and to apply them in practice in a goal-oriented manner. This includes, among other things, the (critical) analysis of medium- and longer-term effects as well as the necessary adaptation of the precondition-rich process design to different social contexts and subject areas.

It needs to be mentioned that these findings do not only apply to citizens, but also to all people in their professional roles in the context of democracy. Politicians, journalists, lawyers, civil servants, scientists, etc. also experience injuries and insecurities. Decision-makers are often required to remain capable of acting and making decisions "at all times". It is obvious that difficult experiences may therefore often not be sufficiently processed, communicated or integrated, even under the guise of a supposed professionalism. In times of stress, excessive demands and significant crises, there is too often no room for comprehensive sensemaking.

Similar to the deep processes made partially visible in this project, (collective) traumas can then subtly influence analysis and decision-making. The extent to which this contributes to socially relevant effects, particularly in areas such as governance, the media, the judiciary or the executive, etc., would need to be examined and explored in greater depth and rigor elsewhere. However, the explosive nature of the war in Ukraine, the Corona pandemic and climate change suggest that the area of (collective) trauma and politics is more topical than ever. One goal to strive for, would be to carry out further processes with participants from active politics, administration and the media, etc. This presupposes that the necessary human and financial resources are available and that the approach presented here can be appropriately adapted to the respective contexts and target groups.

Ultimately, further strengthening the ability to resonate and the willingness to responsibly confront present and future crises, is indispensable for ensuring the healthy future of a vibrant democracy. This not only applies to all members of a democratic society, but is also a continuous practice and outcome of joint efforts of those who constitute such societies.

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# 6 Literature

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**Pocket Project e. V.** aims to foster the comprehensive development of a life-promoting culture in the context of global crises. The core concern of the project is the awareness and resolution of collective and intergenerational trauma. The Pocket Project supports committed citizens in identifying the sources and effects of trauma and developing approaches to heal them. The core competency of the project's work lies in refining systemic awareness and establishing protected group spaces ("pockets of healing") where "pockets of trauma" can heal and integrate. The Pocket Project's work demonstrates that a trauma-informed approach exponentially increases humanity's compassionate and creative potential to address our world's most pressing global challenges.

**Mehr Demokratie e. V.** is probably the largest organization for direct democracy worldwide, with around 10,000 members and 200,000 interested contacts. The core concern of Mehr Demokratie is the continuous development of democracy. For almost 35 years, the association has been working for direct democracy, transparency, fair suffrage and effective citizen participation, e.g., lot-based citizens' councils. It understands that the quality of exchange and decision-making, i.e., democratic culture, is just as important as the improvement of democratic structures. Mehr Demokratie's conviction is that: people want to have a feeling of belonging, live in a self-determined way, get involved and participate in decision-making. Protected spaces and an understanding of emotions and relationship issues help to fully develop the potential that lies in all people and to find co-creative solutions to political issues.

# Annex

# Annex

**TABLE: APPROACHES TO THE TERM "COLLECTIVE TRAUMA"**

| Collective trauma concept emanating from the individual | Collective trauma concept emanating from the collective |
| --- | --- |
| **collective processing of mass individual traumas** <br> From a scientific perspective, Brunner takes a critical view of the concept of collective trauma, similar to Kühner. He therefore proposes to understand collective trauma as "the collective processing of mass individual trauma" (Brunner 2010, own translation). Further link here.[11] | **cultural trauma** <br> Alexander defines "cultural trauma" as a process in which a group, which does not need to be directly affected by a traumatic event, perceives this trauma as relevant because of specific cultural and historical processes. He argues that this process permanently alters the identity of the group. Related link here.[12] |
| **transgenerational/multigenerational trauma** <br> "We are talking about the phenomenon that a trauma experienced in a previous generation that has not been (fully) processed takes effect in a subsequent generation in the form of psychological distress that extends to post-traumatic stress disorder" (Dunkel 2021, p. 217, own translation). Link here.[13] | **trauma politics** <br> "Trauma politics, according to Zembylas (2007), can be defined as an attempt to present certain historical events in such a way that these events acquire a desired meaning in collective memory and are accordingly instrumentalized and deployed in a targeted manner" (Biess 2020, own translation). Reflections on trauma politics in relation to Corona can be found here.[14] |

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11  http://www.agpolpsy.de/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/vortrag-kollektive-traumata-sfu.pdf

12  http://www.agpolpsy.de/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/joas-cultural-trauma-on-the-most-recent-turn-in-jeffrey-alexandere28099s-cultural-sociology.pdf

13  https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11620-021-00619-8

14  https://uni-tuebingen.de/de/177810

**intergenerational vs. transgenerational trauma**
''Schützenberger (2018) distinguishes whether the traumatic experience is explicitly brought up in a family and thus consciously mediated (intergenerational) or whether it is brought to bear via unconscious mechanisms (transgenerational)'' (Dunkel 2021, p. 217, own translation). Link here.[15]

**trauma discourse**
"First, one can talk about a 'collective processing of mass individual traumas'. Second, one can talk about 'collective trauma narratives' or 'trauma discourses' that are either simply 'invented' or refer to actual traumas experienced by individual group members" (Brunner 2010, p. 10, own translation). Link here.[16]

**mass traumatization**
Mass traumatization following massive violent events caused by natural disasters, train accidents or violence affecting a group of people directly. This means that simultaneous traumatization of many individuals results in mass traumatization, hence the classification as "originating from the individual" (Scholz 2014). Link here.[17]

**chosen trauma**
"First, 'Chosen Trauma' presupposes a collective trauma such that not only have many people suffered, but that they have previously understood themselves (or retrospectively understand themselves) as a group, i.e., are connected by identification. [...] Crucial, then, for a mass trauma to qualify as a 'chosen trauma' is the significance of the event for the group's self-understanding and self-definition." (Scholz 2018, p. 296, own translation). Link here.[18]

**"trauma-induced collectives"**
"What is meant by this is that through the persecution of a specific group of people, they first form themselves into a collective; a collective that ultimately has to struggle with the traumatization caused by the persecution, but also finds its cohesion through it" (Brunner 2010, p. 11, own translation). Link here. [19]

15 https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11620-021-00619-8

16 http://www.agpolpsy.de/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/vortrag-kollektive-traumata-sfu.pdf

17 https://wwiiresearchandwritingcenter.com/wp-content/uploads/Sarajevo_ed-Chosen-Trauma.pdf

18 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329440794_Einer_fur_alle_alle_fur_einen_-_Anmerkungen_zu_Vamik_Volkans_Konzept_der_Grossgruppenidentitat/fulltext/5c089c204585157ac1ab0f5b/Einer-fuer-alle-alle-fuer-einen-Anmerkungen-zu-Vamik-Volkans-Konzept-der-Grossgruppenidentitaet.pdf

19 http://www.agpolpsy.de/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/vortrag-kollektive-traumata-sfu.pdf

POCKET PROJECT

MEHR DEMOKRATIE