What's a Democs Game all about?

Democs is a group discussion method based around cards, for 6-8 people lasting 1½ - 2 hours. It aims to enable people to explore new issues, arising maybe in technology or society, without needing any expert knowledge. It was devised by the New Economics Foundation (nef) in 2001, originally on stem cells. Games have now been created on a wide range of issues from cloning to climate change, in numerous European languages (via the EC DECIDE and FUND research projects), and in a wide range of social contexts like government consultations, schools, churches, pubs, healthcare and medicine, science festivals, teaching ethics to science graduates, etc

The aim of Democs is something which can be played anywhere by anyone (16+ years), with no or minimal cost, and requiring no 'experts'. Unlike most public engagement activities, which access relatively few people, Democs aims at a very broad lay participation, with people in the contexts where they normally get together. It can provide some useful information about public views, but its *main* aim is just to get people involved and empowered on current issues.

Democs is a conversation card game. The cards provide the necessary information and stimulate discussion. Players get hands of cards and take turns to play them. But instead of playing to win, they are playing to learn about an important new issue and form their opinions about it and vote on options. At the end of the game, the players will be able to feed back their conclusions.

One person acts as the dealer. It's the dealer's job to explain the rules, ask the questions and deal the cards, but he/she is *not* expected to be an expert on the subject! Usually, the dealer will be the person who has organised the game. If you are thinking about organising a game, go for it! **Democs is designed to be played anywhere, by anyone**. All you need is a kit, six to eight people, a table, and time. You don't need to know anything about the topic to run a game and the rules are simple and easy to understand.

How the game works

A Democs game has five rounds. In rounds 1, 2 and 3, players are dealt different hands of cards which are read out and discussed.
In Round 1 everyone is given a single Story Card to read out.
In Rounds 2 and 3, players are given Information cards and Issue cards, respectively. Each player is asked to look at his/her hand of cards and select two that they think are most important or interesting. When their turn comes, they read them out to the group, say why these ones interest them, and place them on the table. The group can then discuss them.

As the discussion develops, certain topics will come out. In round 4, players are asked to focus these into opinions, questions or statements which they would like to make about bioenergy, by grouping the cards into clusters. There can be several clusters on different topics, each of which gets written down on a cluster card.

In the final round (round 5), each player is given a voting grid and is invited to vote on policy options or the acceptablility or otherwise applications of a technnology, and to give their reasons in their own words. Each player votes as an individual.

You then fill in a feedback form, so we know where and when it was played, the age distribution and gender of the group, and the degree of prior knowledge about the issues. These are gathered up and handed in or sent in an envelope to a collecting address.

More about Democs games
contact Perry Walker, Fellow, New Economics Foundation
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Useful websites
www.neweconomics.org - the originating organisation
www.playdecide.eu – lots of games in lots of languages
www.edinethics.co.uk – author of several of the games

Basic Elements of the Game

Story Cards (Set S)
These are stories about some people and situations to do with the subject, usually with an ethical dilemma. All but one of the people are fictitious but the stories are based on real issues which have arisen, or ones which might arise in the future.

Information Cards (Set A)
These are facts about the subject. These come from experts and reliable sources of information.

Issue Cards (Set B)
These are different viewpoints and opinions on the subject: pros, cons, questions, dilemmas. It's most unlikely everyone will agree with all of them! They are there to make you think.

Cluster Cards
These are used to label groups of cards which the players make and say what they mean. You write directly on these.

Blank Cards
If anyone thinks of something important that's not included, they can write it down on a blank card.

Voting Sheets – these could be one or two types
In some games there is a single sheet with a grid of 4-5 policy options on which each person puts their votes, as an individual. In other games each player is given a sheet with a grid of 8 applications of the technology, to vote on individually, with his/her reasons.

Feedback Form
So that we know who and where your results have come from, what you thought about the game, and what could be improved.

Timetable – 90 minute version

Intro	5 mins	The dealer explains what Democs is about, reads the conversation guidelines, and tells the group what each type of card is for. If the instructions have an introduction to the subject, the Dealer reads this to the group
Round 1: Stories	10 mins	Players use the story cards to introduce some of the issues about the subject through real or imaginary people.
Round 2: Information	15 mins	Players are dealt a hand of information cards. They choose two that interest them, to share with the group. This starts to assemble a shared knowledge 'bank'.
Round 3: Issues	15 mins	Players select from the issue cards in the same way, opening up ethical and social questions that they think are important.
Round 4: Creating clusters	30 mins	The group discusses the topics that are beginning to emerge, making links amongst the cards they have chosen in the previous two rounds. The linked cards from clusters. Each cluster has a theme which is written on the cluster cards.
Round 5: Voting and Feedback	15 mins	Players give their views by voting individually on policy options or applications of the technology. Dealer and Players also fill in the feedback form.