

Sociocracy:

All Voices Matter!

A guide for implementing sociocratic principles in your school

Deepening Democracy

Sociocracy

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yupi
Youth Union of People with Initiative

APISPM FEED-BACK

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CAMILO CASTELO BRANCO
agrupamento de escolas

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“Deepening Democracy”: the project in a nutshell

"Deepening democracy! - a strategy for improving the quality of democracy in school context" is a project of 36 months duration (01/10/2020 to 30/09/2023, covid impacted) coordinated by **YUPI** organization in Famalicão, Portugal, in close partnership with other portuguese partner (**Agrupamento de Escolas Camilo Castelo Branco**), Poland (**EPI** and **Liceum Ogolnoksztalcace w Kielcach**) and Romania (**Asociatia Feedback PM-Brasov** and **Colegiul National de Informatica Grigore Moisil**), for a total number of 1700 young pupils and more than 140 youth workers and teachers in the 3 European countries involved (140 teachers and youth workers and over 60 students will have the chance to engage in international learning experiences). The partners are schools and non governmental organizations already experienced in working in close cooperation for a better integrated system of education for young people, combining formal and non formal learning.

"Deepening democracy!" aims at contributing to the recognition of the importance of cooperation between non formal and formal education systems in order to offer the young pupils a more integrated education and allow more adequate strategies to integrate young people in the society. The two topics chosen by the partners for the local activities in close cooperation between the non formal and formal sectors are:

1) **the method of sociocracy** for a more engaged decision making in schools;
2) **Sustainable development goals** for a more sustainable strategy of the school.

We act at different levels to achieve our goals in these 2 topics: local activities, coordinators meetings, staff training events for youth workers and teachers and short term exchanges of groups of pupils and multiplier events in all countries involved in order to disseminate the outcomes presented through the creation of 2 Intellectual Outputs.

The outputs created during the implementation and closing stage of this project are:

1) a Guide on Sociocracy with results of the research in each school on how decision-making is happening and what can be done for improving the quality of democracy and
2) an Educational game on Sustainable Development Goals created in collaboration between teachers, students and youth workers to inform and explore the SDGs in a more youth friendly and interactive way.

The project is funded by the Erasmus + Education and Training program, through the Portuguese National Agency (2020-1-PT01-KA201-078829).

Partners: Building the project together

YUPI - Youth Union of People with Initiative

YUPI - Youth Union of People with Initiative YUPI is an NGO established in 2008, located in Vila Nova de Famalicão, Portugal. Over 1000 young individuals and youth workers actively participate in our local, national, and international activities.

Our mission is to empower young people, fostering active citizenship, informed decision-making, and the realization of their project ideas for personal growth and community development. Non-formal education is the key tool we use to promote the social transformation we envision.

In collaboration with local schools, we offer training courses for teachers and youth workers, engaging young individuals in mobility, volunteering, and political initiatives.

YUPI focuses on four main dimensions:

1) Active participation and citizenship;
2) Volunteering in the community;
3) Mobility in Europe;
4) Development of competences through non-formal education.

Our ultimate aim is to motivate and empower youth as an instrument of active participation and citizenship.

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Youth Union of People with Initiative

Agrupamento de Escolas Camilo Castelo Branco

The AECCB is the largest cluster of Vila Nova de Famalicão schools (3906 students, 428 teachers and 126 non-teaching staff), with 11 school establishments, from nursery school to 12th grade. It has 4 scientific-humanistic courses, 6 professional courses, articulated teaching of music and dance in the basic and secondary levels, a Qualifying Center for adults, and a Learning Support Center with 4 poles. AECCB is also a headquarters for teachers' training. It is a specialized reference for deaf students and it has a high number of autistic students.

The AECCB has a learning center for high performance athletes (UAARE), it is a European eTwinning school, an Erasmus+ accredited school in both the school and VET sectors. The AECCB has extensive experience in international activities, in the context of the Erasmus+ projects, European Club, European Parliament Ambassador School, Euroscola (6 participations, in Strasbourg), "From Minho to Europe" competitions (visits to Brussels), eTwinning projects, UNESCO School Network, school sports and inclusion, study visits abroad, among others.

This experience has made it possible to qualify staff in multilingual communication, motivation for innovation and digital education, more and better skills in Project Based Learning (PBL) and collaborative work, greater familiarity with the European education strategy and the European institutions, more OER products, reflected in students with better academic results, self-determined and with more and different opportunities.

The AECCB is committed to active participation by giving voice to students, teachers, staff and families, illustrated by the Principal's motto and commitment "Together, Building the Future." One of the group's strategic objectives is to deepen its internationalization, relying on local and international partners and a Project Internationalization Team, whose mission is to coordinate this internationalization, in the sense of greater participation in the democratic management of the school group, in the present and future of Portugal and in the challenges of the European Union.

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Association Education by the Internet - AEI

Association Education by the Internet - AEI (in Polish: Stowarzyszenie Edukacja przez Internet - EPI) was established in 2004 by a dynamic team of young visionaries, always seeking new challenges. Our primary focus is on educational and training programs tailored to young people, youth workers, teachers, NGOs, companies, institutions, and entrepreneurs.

AEI actively evaluates the education system, seeking innovative methods to enhance it, with a particular expertise in promoting non-formal and informal learning, as well as distance education (e-learning) targeted at young individuals. Over the years, we have successfully executed projects aimed at young people, leveraging the Erasmus+ and "Youth in Action" programs to conduct activities and events that enhance their knowledge and skills, including soft skills. Our support extends to youth workers, offering training, guidance, and assistance to non-governmental/non-profit organizations, as well as entities dedicated to youth empowerment and development.

IV Liceum Ogolnoksztalcace w Kielcach

IV Liceum Ogolnoksztalcace w Kielcach (IV LO w Kielcach) is a general secondary school. IV LO has 600 students in 19 forms.

IV LO, which is situated in the centre of Kielce – the capital of Swietokrzyskie Region, offers typical secondary school courses. There is a range of subjects that the students learn at extended levels such as Maths, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, IT, Social Studies, Geography, English or Polish. Our students get very good results at their school-leaving exams. The school mainly prepares students for further education at universities. The majority of our graduates continue their education at medical, engineering and law faculties.

The school's aim is to make our students open-minded, understanding and respectful citizens of the world. We show them European values such as peace, collaboration and democracy. We also teach them how to get actively involved in democratic governance of the schools.

The teachers of IV LO w Kielcach are all well-qualified and their aim is to give students a chance to gain knowledge in a modern and attractive way. This is why IV LO w Kielcach has taken part in various European projects such as the Comenius project on ecology as well as e-twinning projects. Since 2016 it has been taking part in a KA1 project (staff mobility) and KA2 project.

Association for Social Integration and Environmental Protection “Feed-Back” BraşoV

Association for Social Integration and Environmental Protection “Feed-Back” Braşov (shortly, APIS PM “Feed-Back”), a Romanian non-governmental, non-profit, and apolitical organization, operates in Brașov City since 2004.

Our focus is on the social reintegration of disadvantaged individuals and environmental protection. We established the Braşov Volunteer Centre in 2008, enlisting over 500 people, dedicated to positively impacting their community. Our volunteers actively engage in international, national, and local activities, with over 70 participating in Erasmus+ projects and local initiatives.

We empower young individuals, fostering transversal competences for active Romanian civil society participation and community involvement. APIS PM “Feed-Back” collaborates with the VOLUM Federation and the Brașov County Department for Sports and Youth to promote volunteering and implement youth-related strategies and policies.

Our expertise lies in social, environmental, youth, and educational areas, executing diverse local community development projects.

Grigore Moisil National College of Computer Science

Grigore Moisil National College of Computer Science is a prestigious high school in Brașov, Romania, named after the eminent academician Grigore Moisil, renowned as the “founder” of Romanian computer sciences.

The institution, with a long-standing history in Brașov County, was established in 1938 and evolved into a High School of Computer Science in 1973. In recognition of its significance, the school was bestowed with the name “Grigore Moisil” National College in 2002.

With 720 students currently enrolled, the college offers four middle school classes and 21 high school classes, including profiles with intensive studies in computer science, English, and German. The college is guided by 51 well-qualified teachers committed to imparting knowledge in a modern and appealing manner. Students actively participate in scientific, cultural, and volunteer activities, often collaborating with state institutions and major private companies.

The school’s strong motivation is aimed at nurturing new competences and abilities among its pupils and teachers.

What does this guide bring you? How to use it?

This guide was developed during the “Deepening Democracy” project in a co-operation between Portugal, Poland and Romania.

The concept of Sociocracy was introduced by the coordinator of the project (YUPI) that has been part of an international training course on “Sociocracy in schools” by the Wondering School project.

In this guide you will find some information about the Sociocracy Method, how it was implemented in 3 different school contexts to raise the level of democracy in decision-making and some examples how it is explored in other projects.

We aim at presenting the potential of Sociocracy and give you some tools and inspiration to go deeper on this method, adjusting to your reality and being able to say, from practice, that ALL VOICES MATTER!

Socio…what?

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Democracy presupposes the participation of all. However, its reformulations and adaptations over time have led us to the most recurrent model which is called representative democracy. Through this model, the people democratically choose the leaders who will represent them, for example, in government. They are given the powers of representation and their decisions are legitimate within the legalized model. In Sociocracy it is different. The people may even elect leaders or formal representatives, but they also participate in all decision-making. Thus, the measures always receive popular consultation. Therefore, it presupposes an active society as a living organism, constantly giving opinions and making decisions.

DEMOCRACY

demos (people) + kratos (power) = the power of the people

SOCIOCRACY

socius (companions) + kratos (power) = power of the companions

History of Sociocracy

At the beginning of the 19th century, the French philosopher Auguste Comte, famous for being one of the founders of Sociology and also of Positivism, coined the term Sociocracy. According to him, Sociocracies would be a system of government based on decisions made taking into account the opinion of equal individuals, members of an organizational structure similar to a living organism.

Sociocracy aims to articulate society in the participation of decisions, that is, according to the precepts of Augusto Comte, self-organisation is fundamental in sociocracy. The term tries to express this idea, since it means the government of society, based on collective intelligence.

In 1926, the Boekes (Kees Boeke and Beatrice Cadbury) founded the first sociocratic organization - the WerkplaatsKindergemeenschap, a community of pupils and teachers who functioned as equals.The school was called "Children's Community Workshop" because Boeke wanted the pupils to function as workers whose job was to learn. The term "school" was very much associated with the concept of training.

The "Children's Community Workshop" still exists in Utrecht and operates according to the same principles. Kees Boeke's best known essay is entitled "Sociocracy: Democracy as it might be".

Gerard Endenburg is the founder of the Sociocratic Circle Method, which today is widely referred to as Sociocracy, he formalized its principles to be broadly applicable to all types of organizations. Born in 1933 in the Netherlands, Gerard was influenced in his youth by his activist parents who advocated political reform. He experienced alternative methods from an early age when he started attending Kees Boeke's school, the Children's Community Workshop (DeWerkplaats Kindergemeenschap) during the Second World War.

Endenburg used the principles of that school and later formulated his own vision of families, schools and companies run in a sociocratic way in the book "Sociocracy: The OrganizationOf Decision Making".

The 4 Principles for Sociocratic Circles

CONSENT DECISIONS - THE PRINCIPLE OF SUPREME OBJECTIONS

Endenburg tried hard to think of a way for employees and managers to make decisions together, in a fair and efficient way. He saw disadvantages in a majority vote, where the minority is not included in the final decision. He was inspired by the "consent" in decision-making at the Werkplaatschool. He took a personal retreat and used the principles of cybernetics and engineering and their workings to elaborate his theory of decision-making.

In decision making by consent, a reasoned argument must be put forward to object to a proposal. All objections are integrated into the proposal to improve it until everyone can agree on the proposal's progress.

CIRCLES AS AUTONOMOUS GROUPS

To solve the problems inherent in a top-down structure, Gerard developed a governance structure based on small groups formed into self-governing circles. Each circle has an area of responsibility and members decide how the work is done by consent. In this way the people most affected by the decisions are involved in the decisions.

SELECTION FOR ROLES BY CONSENT

Endenburg found that people were reluctant to give feedback on the capabilities and performance of others personally. He then created the process of selecting people for certain jobs by group consent, with everyone in a circle defining the desirable profile and participating in the process of sociocratic choice.

DOUBLE-BIND ENSURES FEEDBACK

Endenburg developed the principle of double-linkage to link the circles and reach out to more people in an organisation.each circle has representatives, who take the information not only to the upper circles, but also to the lower circles.this structure forms an interlinked system that includes the whole organisation, ensuring feedback in all areas.

Sociocratic Election

1. Review role

- Review responsibilities and duration of the term
- List desired characteristics

2. Submit nominations

- I [your name], nominate [candidate name] as [role]
- People can nominte themselves

3. Share reasons

- Write arguments for each candidate
- Count nominations for each candidate

4. Invite changes

- Check who would like to change their nomination
- Share reasons for the change

5. Propose candidate

- Propose candidate based on strength of arguments
- Arguments are more important than no. of nominations

6. Objections and consent

- Integrate objections*
- Ask for the candidate's consent last

Integrate Objections

- **Ask** the person who has the objection:
  - What do you need to give your consent?
  - Is there anything missing in the proposal?
  - How do you think the proposal could work for you as well as the others in this group?
- **Round**: "How can we resolve this?" (collect proposals)
- Brief **dialogue** between 2 or 3 individuals (the group observes)
- Collect proposals in **smaller groups**
- **Facilitator** amends the proposal
- Conduct an **experiment** (define period)
- **Free discussion** in defined time
- Ask proposal **creators(s)** to rework proposal
- Refer to **lower** or **higher circle**
- Create or refer to **research committee**

Important!

- Elect someone for a specific term length
- Elect someone who is good enough, not perfect
- Don't ask for volunteers or who's interested
- Don't have a discussion during a round

Sociocracy in the words of experts

The partners of *Deepening Democracy* consider it important that the reader gets the perspective of Sociocracy and other examples of current practices of this method in schools.
Therefore we have interviewed and below we share main outcomes for more information and inspiration.

Wondering School project

by Marianne Osorio



What do you love about Sociocracy?

What I love is the potential to hear and integrate all voices from everyone who is in the circle.

When were you introduced to Sociocracy?

I was introduced in 2015 in a workshop by James Priest, who was the creator of Sociocracy 3.0, and back then I was already visiting many democratic schools around the world. I was myself using majority rule in decision making and problematizing this majority rule and I know sociocracy I thought that it could be a way to overcome some challenges I had experienced in democratic schools (like polarization, conflicts, exclusion of minorities, reproduction of the status quo,..) and so we had a great finding when we visited sociocratic schools.

What main values does Sociocracy work for/is based on?

In my perspective the main values are Equality, Transparency, Inclusion, Fairness and Collaboration.

What do you think are possible "consequences" of using such methods of decision-making?

Certainly one consequence is to practice active/deep listening, people become more empathic, increase in participation (sitting in a circle where everyone speaks), the level of engagement and sense of community increases. In terms of power structure, there is definitely a distribution of power and responsibility and so people can take more power and responsibility for the decisions that they make together - so an empowerment of people in general. In what concerns conflicts, this sociocratic method can also be applied in conflict mediation approach, often integrated with non violent communication, and when

that happens we can see a difference on how gentle way a conflict can happen - we are used to punitive systems when we try to mediate a conflict (even in democratic schools with punishments or fines). But with sociocracy everyone has a chance to contribute and share what they would like to do and what they think it would be fair for mediating the conflict. Even for the "aggressor" or someone who broke the rule, they still can have a say on what they propose doing and everyone would need to consent on the decision so it comes to a more peaceful agreement.

Do you see it can work in different ages? From early ages to adults?

Yes, certainly. It's difficult to say when you can start using it with children, it depends on each child. But as soon as a child can sit for a while (even for a short time) and engage in a conversation, it is already possible to practice. It can be some very simple to talk and put into action and there are some interesting ways to interact with smaller children if you use some toys or play-do in the middle of the circle or start with some body exercise or some playful activities and then jump into decisions making - there are ways to do it in a more child-friendly way. In the schools we have visited we have seen it was practiced from the age of 4 years old.



Credits: School Circles

How can someone get more information and training about how to implement Sociocracy?

There are a few organizations that are specialized in sociocracy training. The founders of the method are in the Netherlands (Sociocratic centrum) and from there they have created all the Sociocratic centrums in the world and they all offer sociocracy training (in Germany and Austria).

And then there is *Sociocracy For All*, which is an organization who's doing a lot of training online and they are more accessible and they're trying to reach out to more people and also free resources online. I think there are very simple things that we can do to start implementing it. We don't necessarily need a full training. If you have access to a few resources and you want to start practicing, maybe you don't need to do a full training.

In my organization, which is Wondering School, we offer a short sociocratic training for educators and schools and parents as well. It's more focused on sociocracy in the educational context and I would also like to say that we published the "School Circles" film and what we've seen and the feedback that we collected is that many schools, many communities and groups after watching the film already feel empowered to start practicing themselves.

Anything else you would like to share with teachers/adults that are willing to try?

I would like to share that it just takes a little practice where you are in the best way you can. If you want to start practicing with your kids, just get a talking stick and sit in a circle. It can be with your family, it can be with your students. Just get a talking stick, start listening to each other in rounds. That's a great start just to make sure that everyone can be heard and speak and everyone can listen to one another without interrupting. This is such a powerful tool. I guess this is the best way to start with children and also with adults. I was a science teacher in a public school in Brazil and I started practicing circles with my students during my science lessons. That was my little gap of possibility where I could implement some democratic decision making with the kids and I did it. I'm sure that even people that are in public schools, they can start implementing that in their classrooms or in some extra curricular project.

There are infinite possibilities. The teachers can also start implementing in the teachers' meetings or in the parents meetings. I think that the structure sometimes is already there. We just need to bring the facilitation and the socio democratic process to the existing meetings. I would encourage people to start small and from where they are already.

Learning community EKOA

by Maria Inês Teixeira
(pedagogical coordinator)



What do you love about Sociocracy?

For me, sociocracy is a methodology that reminds us that all needs matter, always. Our individual needs and the needs of those around us. It is a collective model of self-management that creates a positive environment for everyone to participate in decision making.

How does Sociocracy work in EKOA?

Sociocracy is present in our daily routine in several moments including in our communication and conflict management with the children from all ages. We carry out decision circles on a weekly basis, which are focused on making decisions based on the consent of all those involved. In this safe space, children and adults bring guidelines (associated with the needs of each one) that are shared and discussed in a large group. All decisions taken are based on the sociocracy method.

What consequences do you see in everyone's attitude (children, teachers, parents) because of implementing such practices of decision making?

Sociocracy operates from the assumption that people are able to make decisions for themselves. More than that, they will also be more committed and intrinsically motivated when they make their own decisions.

Throughout this year at EKOA, the children, teachers and parents understood their role and acted positively in the community. They participated and demonstrated initiative and responsibility at school and community. They were also able to negotiate for the common good, to communicate and to defend the sense of possibility, believed in transformation, reflected, planned and executed the action strategically, then independently or with the help of others. They engaged and involved other people to make adjustments and use leadership role models to the development of their potential as a leader. Everyone ended up having an opinion, being able to explain and reply and adjust their thinking about a decision. They have a voice and have initiative. They speak up, identify, understand, avoid and clarify misunderstandings and ambiguities.



What values & competences do you want to promote through the sociocracy method?

Regarding values, I feel that equal value, efficiency and transparency are promoted, what we do makes a difference, everyone's voice matters. This does not mean we are all identical or equally persuasive. It does mean we exercise "power-with" rather than "power over"; We work openly. No backroom deals, secret ballots, or private information. Regarding competences, I would choose collaboration, active citizenship, agency, leadership, individual and collective responsibility.

What do you have to say to another teacher/adult interested in implementing such methods?

Using sociocracy, children feel part of the decision, increasing their sense of belonging. This makes everyone feel part of the community and increases the urgency of contributing to change and transform their contexts and society in general. Sociocracy allows to work and develop transversal skills that are part of the student's profile. For sociocracy to work, it is also very important that we all use non-violent communication as the core of our peer-to-peer communication. We must always bear in mind equality of value, respect for individuality and active listening.

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https://www.facebook.com/comunidadeekoa

Learning community EKOA

by Sara Gomes, 9 years old (student)

Hi Sara, what do you do at EKOA?

S: I'm Sara, I'm 9 years old... I play a lot, I do a lot of projects... and I study. I am in the third grade.

What do you like most about your school?

S: Lots of things, I like everything, but one thing I really like is that decisions are made by everyone.

So, how do you make decisions at your school?

S: Every Thursday morning we have a decision circle. Every child or adult during the week puts on a board in the common room a proposal they want to make to improve the school or something they want to change at school and then every Thursday morning we decide together.

Ok. Can you give an example?

S: A proposal that was very hard to decide on...Some older girls had a dog, Vassouras, and he was always coming into the school...Some people wanted him to stay at school and others didn't, because they were afraid of him. So.. it took a long time to decide...until it got to a point where we didn't decide completely, but Vassouras just walked away...



And can you give me another example of a proposal in the Decision Circle?

S: The little ones, they eat at noon and the big ones eat at 1:00 p.m. And we, the big ones, didn't like it. We didn't like it because we were too hungry. So we took it to the Circle and started eating at 12:30. Then it didn't work because on Wednesdays we had to do projects until 1:00 p.m. So, it went back to 1:00 p.m. And now it's...it's before 1:00 p.m.



But how does it work? Somebody makes a proposal and how does it happen?

S: somebody makes a proposal and ..... And then we all decide together. And if there's some... that does not consent, it is an objection. And then we decide again and if it's something more...that we need to talk about with the parents, we go to the parent's meeting.

And what do you do with the objections? Is it the majority that decides or...what do you do with the objections?

S: If there's an objection, the person who made the objection has to explain why and give another proposal.

Ok. And if the person doesn't have an idea for another proposal?

S: We try to decide all together.

Anyone else can give a proposal?

S: Yes. But they have to have a reason why they don't want to.

Ok, and you all welcome that reason, that need?

S: Yes

So, do you see that everyone respects the decisions made in the circle?

S: It depends on the decisions. We have a toy day. And on toy day, we have an agreement that we only bring 2 toys. Or I guess it was 1... And a lot of people are bringing a toy, only it's a kit... of many toys. So, I think this is not being very respected, but also...it's only one day a week, so...I also understand that this happens.

What happens when you don't respect some decision made in the circle? What happens to that child or that adult who didn't respect that decision?

S: If someone knows that someone did not respect...we go back to the circle and discuss another decision. But imagine that.... (It often happens) that the teachers bring candies to school. When we have an agreement that you cannot bring candy to school. And they say "it's, like, it's cake, on a birthday, we bring it to everyone", and they're just eating it themselves. So, we took it to the circle again to decide again.

Okay, what did you decide?

S: That if the teachers wanted to bring breakfast (which they say they bring breakfast) they could bring a piece of fruit and bread, no cakes.

So, do you feel that in your school everyone is of equal value?

S: Yes, the educators can't bring sweets and we can't either.



What happened in Portugal, Poland and Romania with SOCIOCRACY?

International Cooperation - "How sociocracy can work?"

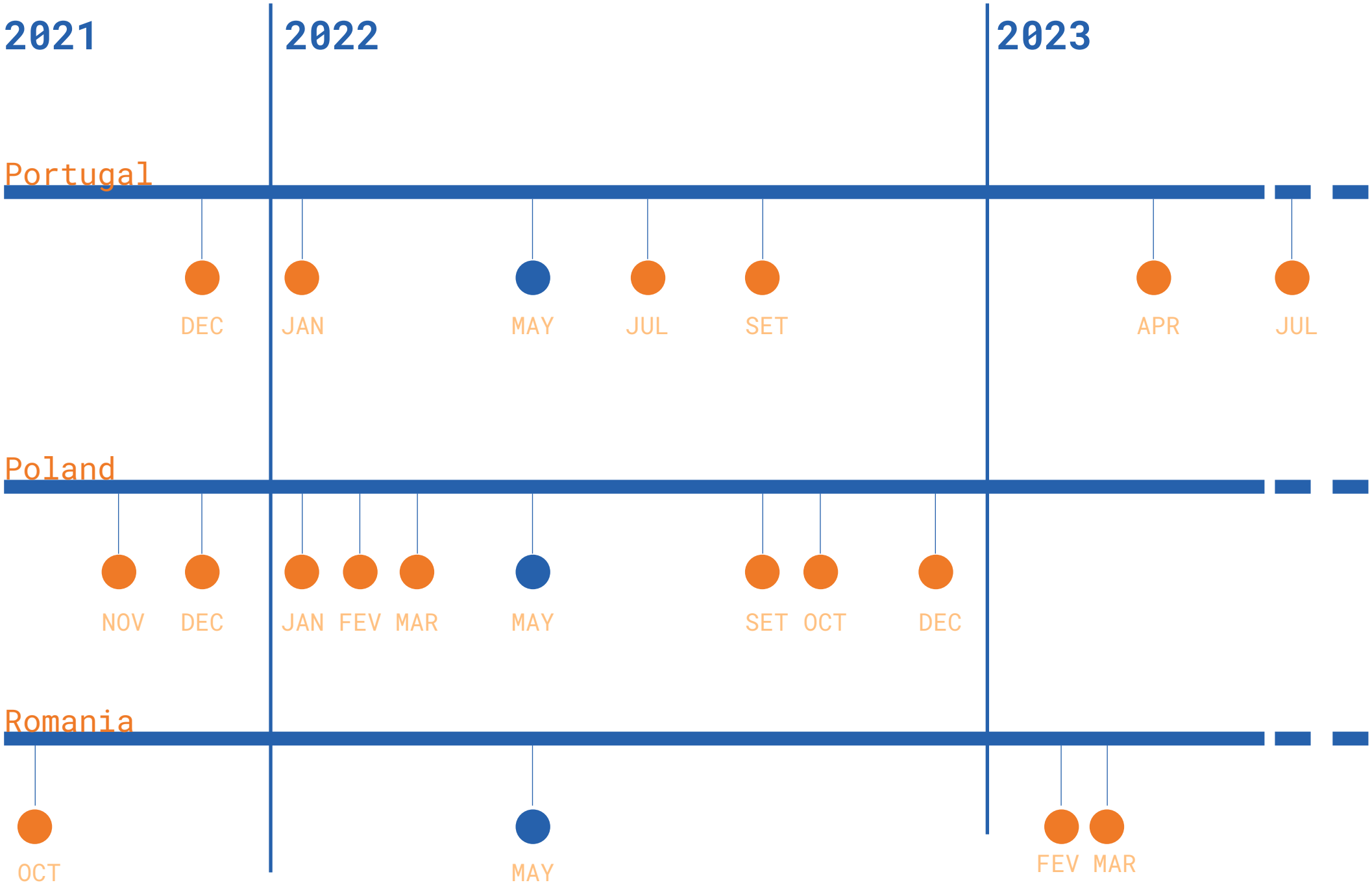
A short term training course for teachers and staff, Poland, May 2022

"Deepening democracy - how sociocracy can work?" – workshops on sociocracy for teachers and staff members of all partner organizations in this project, coordinated by YUPI and EPI (Mariana Marques and Tomasz Moleda as trainers).

The training participants were teachers and youth workers from Romania, Portugal, and Poland. Participants were introduced to the principles of sociocracy, learnt many examples of its use, and also had the opportunity to try it out in practice to better understand and apply it in schools. This was the first stage of introducing sociocracy, as it is important to remember that for the process to be effective, its principles must be fully understood by all those involved.

16 participants took part in the training.

But many steps came before and after, let's check it out...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In December 2021…

…. a group of 7 students from 11th grade prepared a questionnaire using the Scale of Reference for Democratic Schools (supported by teachers from AECCB and educators from YUPI) and collected 311 answers from teachers, students, non teaching staff and parents about the quality of democracy in the school and deepened the perception of the school actors about the democratic procedures inside the school.



In January 2022…

… the same group of students invited teachers, non teaching staff, parents and other students and runned a workshop where, through the methodology of world caffe, debated the highlights from the questionnaire and collected answers and recommendations to foster the quality of Democracy in the school. The students were supported by teachers and educators (AECCB and YUPI) and registered many interesting suggestions that were later presented in the Pedagogical council as…

Some recommendations that were shared due to the workshop:

- The creation a common European Union school subject on politics, citizenship and associativism, taking into account values and with interactivity, with a common discussion forum platform where we could work together, debate and share experiences;
- The establishment of a minimum amount per student to be converted into a budget for student associations;
- The promotion of internal referenda for students on matters of fractious decisions concerning them;
- The development of interactive programmes and games to encourage youth political learning and practice.
- One way for them to develop political literacy could be through small voting's like "what will next week's food be" or "what activities will next term have". Small voting's without any major consequences can improve our sense of responsibility and get students used with the idea of voting.
- Having debates at school about political and social issues;
- Election simulations when there are elections on the country, following the official procedures so students can learn what to do and what to bring once they are old enough to vote;
- Create a club where the students can learn and discuss about politics since a lot of this students don't learn important aspects and the differences of the political parties that are available.
- Schools should promote voting for school elections more. This way students would learn about the responsibility of voting for the candidates.
- History lessons should be established for everybody, focusing on the politics. If the students learn about what happened in the past, they could avoid making the same mistakes in the political world.
- Integrate a school council once a week mandatory in every European school
- Integrate a mandatory subject for every high school student regarding human rights, law, economics, and political matters worldwide.
- Creating Erasmus+ projects that involve politicians instead of teachers.

In May 2022…

… Four teachers from AECCB and 1 educator from YUPI took part in the international training course "How sociocracy works?" in Kielce, Poland, and got to know the method in a theoretical but mostly how to implement it and create a plan to run this method in the school.

when teachers feel motivated and have support, magic happens….and so…

In July 2022…

…The coordinators of the project presented the idea of nominating the students representative from all 10th grades in the school (19 classrooms) with the method of sociocracy. That idea need to be submitted, presented and approved by the Pedagogical Council because it would challenge the current policies of voting expressed in the Internal Regulation Document. It was approved because innovation demands some courage and doing things "out of the box", respecting rules but also creating space for new ideas to thrive.

In September 2022…

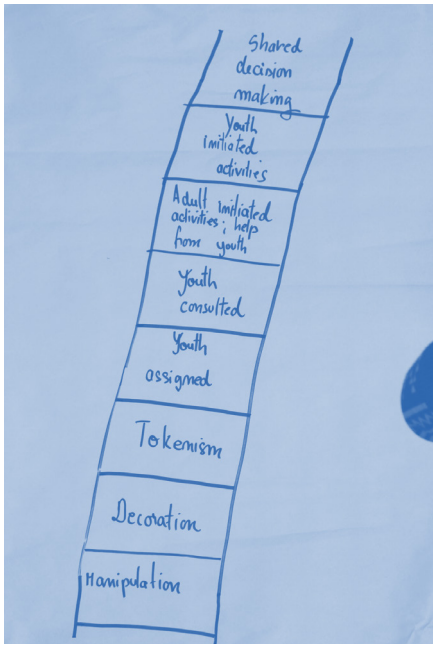
… A group of 19 teachers got introduced to Sociocracy and how it can work, in a training and simulation of 6 hours with the trainer Mariana Marques from YUPI association. The teachers got support, step-by-step information and motivation to implement in their classrooms. After all teachers have implemented this method (december 2022), we have evaluated their perception and got very positive feedback (more awareness of the process and the role, more legitimacy for representing the classroom, more participation and inclusion and teachers trust more the process of representation).



From April to July 2023…

… The project coordinators presented the method of Sociocracy in 4 different conferences or multiplier events that involved a total of 130 people. We had the opportunity to showcase our experience, how to run sociocracy for nomination of representatives and invite others to try this method:

- Deepening Democracy dissemination moment (online), 26th april, 16 people
- Erasmus Market in Vila Nova de Famalicão, 8th may, 90 people (conference and workshop)
- Social Transformation Forum, 7th july, 14 people (workshop)
- Pedagogical Forum in Agrupamento de Escolas Camilo Castelo Branco, 12th july, 40 people









In July 2023…

… Due to the success of this experience, the school is motivated to raise the number of classrooms using this method and in the next school year (2023/2024), the new Class Head Teachers from 10th grade will get training for implementing, together with the 11th grade Class Head Teachers that are already experienced. September is a month of new beginnings….

In Poland

School Participatory Budget

School's participatory budget was implemented based on joint activities of the School and the Association. Main activities:

- 16 November -17 December 2021 – working on ideas- workshops on time, tasks and management with the support of EPI (Stowarzyszenie Edukacja przez Internet); working on project applications
- 31th January - 13th February – promotional campaign, information materials at school and social media
- 14th February-18th February- voting and choosing the best ideas
  March – June 2022 – realization of the winner project
- December 2022 - Planning a new school participatory budget for the year 2023

- **21st June 2022**

  workshops on sociocracy for the participants of international Erasmus+ project meeting in IV LO in Kielce

The next stage was to familiarize the second group with the subject of sociocracy - students from Romania, Portugal, and Poland. The participants learned in detail the principles associated with the sociocracy process and the assumptions of this method. The students participated in a simulation of this method, thanks to which they felt the power of the choices made by the sociocracy method. They learned about the mechanism of operation and the individual steps that must be taken when making a joint decision. The training was attended by 32 participants, including 16 from Poland.



8th September 2022

workshops on sociocracy for the teachers of IV LO in Kielce – with the support of AEI; planning a new, innovative way of choosing candidates for the school's student's council

A representative of the Association conducted a workshop for teachers at a school in Kielce. As only a few representatives participated in the first training session (for participants from Romania, Portugal, and Poland), there was a need to train more teachers to facilitate the implementation process of the sociocracy method in making school decisions. The chosen topic was the selection of candidates for the school council. Teachers went through a simulation of the process with the Association representative and were trained in a way that would allow them to conduct a similar process with their students. Participants asked many questions, and all doubts were clarified to ensure that the teachers knew the method's assumptions precisely and could become experts for their students.

More than 10 participants took part in the training.







September 2022

choosing candidates for school's students council using sociocracy method

◇ The class teachers conducted elections in their classes. The teachers were previously trained, so they knew how to apply the process. The group's goal was to select candidates in the classes who would run for the school council elections. In the classes, the participants jointly determined what qualities such a candidate should possess and then considered which of the students had these qualities. Each participant had the opportunity to express their opinion and present arguments. The classes made a joint decision in such a way that everyone agreed on the final verdict.

Student council elections were held in 5 classes.

October 2022

using sociocratic method in making various decisions on class level e.g. choosing a place for a class trip

The students as well as teachers were very fond of this method because each person participating in the decision-making process had to express their opinion, and every individual's opinion mattered. The participants learn to express their views while respecting the other person's opinion. Furthermore, the group is collectively responsible for the decision made, as everyone takes part, and each person takes responsibility for their expressed opinion to reach a decision that everyone agrees with. Teachers began implementing sociocracy in other areas of the class, such as selecting the destination for a class trip. The use of this method encourages participants to delve into the discussed topic, prepare in advance, find information on costs, attractions, or transportation. In this way, young people acquire new skills through experiences they encounter on their journey.

Other choices using the sociocratic method (e.g. choosing a place for a class trip) were made in at least 2 classes.



Establishing the "Democracy Club"

For our Romanian partners, Sociocracy was a novel concept, and this novelty served as one of the main motivations for their participation in the project. Following the first training course in Portugal, the Romanian team decided to create a new club where students could actively engage in the deepening democracy process at their school. The Democracy Club was established in November 2021 as a result of teachers participating in the first training course on non-formal education held in Portugal in October 2021. The open call for the Democracy Club attracted nearly 30 students from X, XI, and XII grades. The initial meetings were dedicated to presenting the Deepening Democracy project and organizing the new structures.

Democracy Club in action

- On December 13, 2021, APIS PM Feedback organized an online meeting with the Democracy Club to gain insights into the educational context from the students' perspective. The webinar explored the students' interest in participating in decision-making at the school level.
  Several aspects were highlighted during the meeting, including:

Communication gaps between students and between teachers and students.

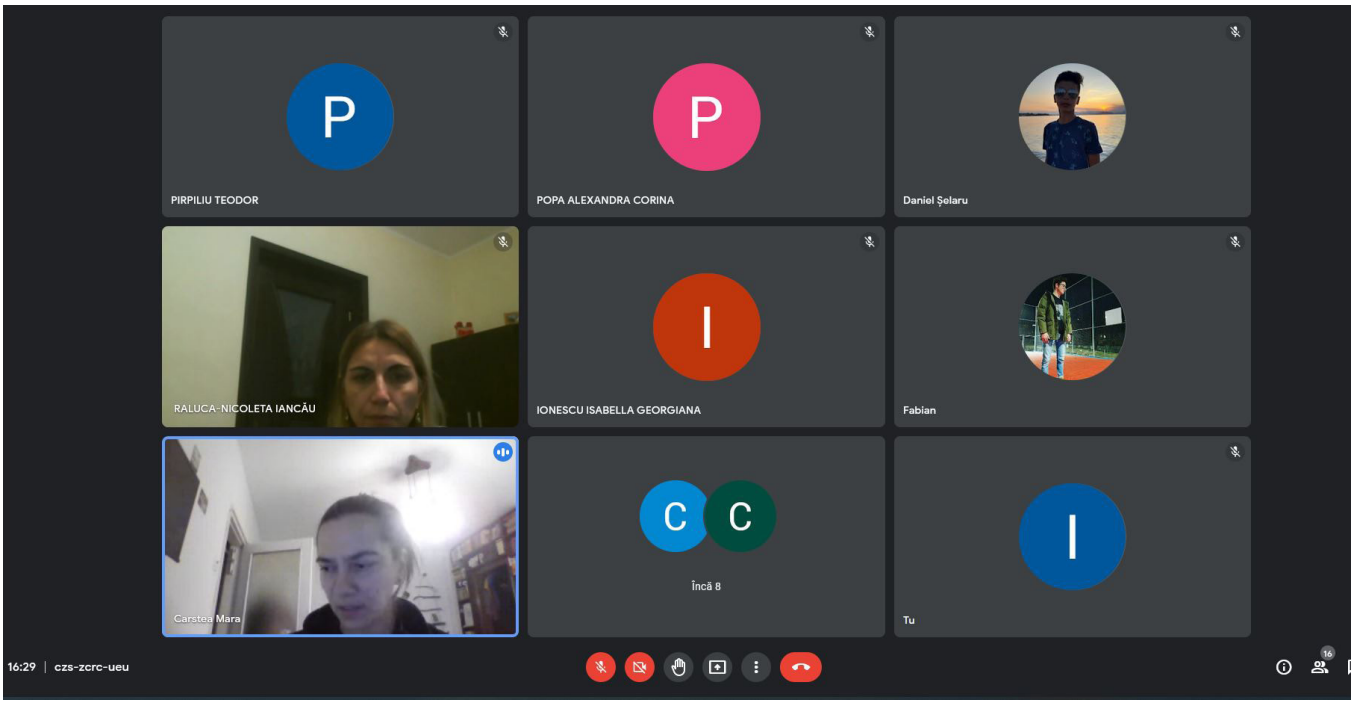
1. Establishing a team of students to represent their interests in school-level decision-making.
2. The significance of personal self-development through involvement in non-formal activities, fostering self-confidence.
3. Promoting respect and seriousness within the Democracy Club.
4. Providing a platform for students to express themselves freely.
5. Utilizing the club's opportunities to increase understanding of civic activism.
6. Enhancing communication and encouraging free expression of opinions.
7. Involving students more in the school community and society.



This event was followed by another online meeting in December 2021, focusing on decision-making power in the educational process. The exercise aimed to help students understand the different entities making decisions, the level of responsibility, and the types of decisions, ranging from legislative to local ones (college level). By describing a typical day of a student from leaving home to returning after school, students recognized the impact of various decisions on their education, covering aspects like access to utilities, school facilities, transportation, and study programs. The workshop lasted about 2 hours, and although there was no time to discuss the curriculum and pupil representation, the pupil decision-making structures were mentioned. The students realized that every step towards the school is influenced by local, county, or national decisions, offering potential subjects for analysis and work within the club.

The facilitators recommended several actions/activities:

1. Training on the student-teacher relationship, focusing on active student participation in high school decisions, applicable legislation, and formal and informal relationships within the school.
2. Training and experimentation with advocacy campaigns to empower students to express their needs and suggest solutions, including negotiation tactics.
3. Introduction to participatory budgeting at institutional and municipal levels, providing training and applications to involve students in decision-making processes.



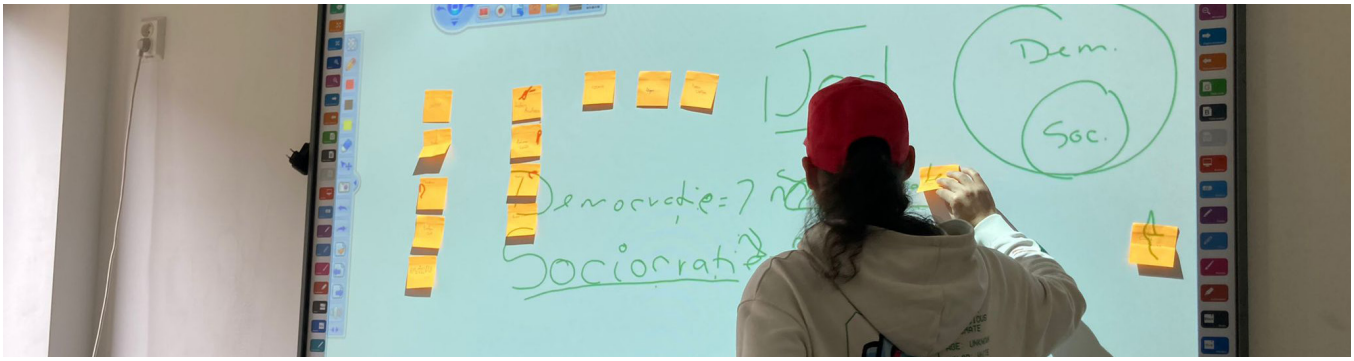
Participatory Budgeting Exercise Using Sociocracy

February 2023

In 2023, in Brasov, the municipality opened the participatory budgeting for young people, allowing them to propose and vote on projects. In February 2023, the club members organized a session about participatory budgeting to showcase this process and encourage young people to actively participate in the participatory budgeting in Brasov city. During this simulation, 30 students participated, and their proposals were related to:

- Cleaning of classroom fans (12 votes)
- Career guidance (7 votes)
- Improvement of the football pitch (4 votes)
- Improvement of the sports hall (2 votes)

During the process, the facilitators applied sociocratic principles and conducted rounds of responses, resulting in four proposals selected for the proposed amount of 500 euros.





Choosing leaders (simulation) using Sociocracy

April 2023

In April 2023 APIS PM Feedback Brasov facilitated a workshop on sociocracy with 9 grade students. The students actively engaged in discovering this concept, participating in an exercise to choose the class leader. The process lasted 1 hours the students' thoughtful opinions were commendable, reflecting their enthusiasm during group discussions.

Sociocracy for teachers

After the course on Sociocracy in Poland, the teachers that took part in the course delivered the information to the other teachers of the college presenting this new concept to them.Teachers organised workshops for their students at their classes and talked about this concept and importance in a democratic school.

Some teachers did simulations of sociocracy at their classes.

All the infopack on sociocracy was delivered to the teachers of the college for their own use.

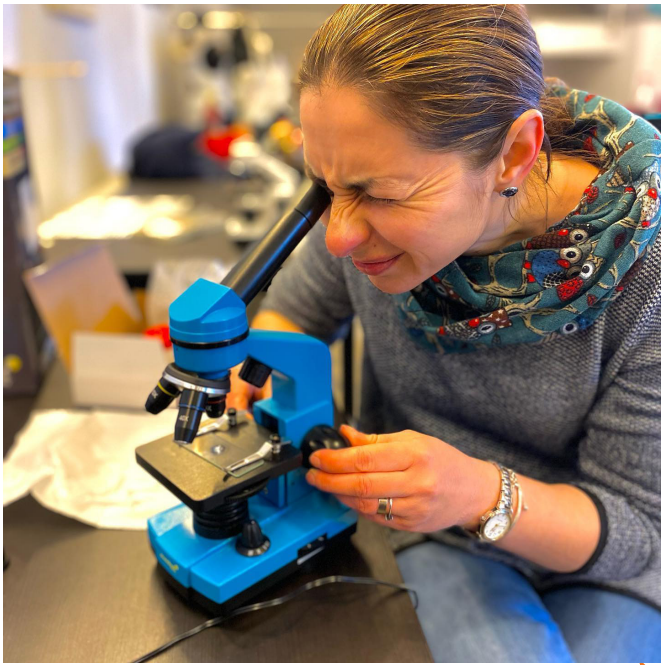
Democracy Club became a core of students and teachers that believe in the democratic values and the freedom of speech and expression.

There were organised debates, meetings and activities related to democracy.









Learning from experience… and what's next?

On the 26th april 2023, all partners organized the launch of the draft version of the publication and took the opportunity to share the local practices of Sociocratic method in action: in Portugal for the selection of classes representatives from all 19 school classes from the 10the grade, in Romania they used Socioccracy for deciding on a budget allocation and in Poland they used sociocratic method for election of President of each classroom among students.

It is an important moment to learn from experience, to allow us to stop, share and reflect on the practices and get some insights from the experience and also be open for feedback from external "eyes".

This webinar had the participation of 25 staff members from different organizations (including the project partners).



From the implementation of this method at the local level we got many different ideas and curiosities that have been raised and need further research. Here we present some ideas and, by using our critical thinking, we explore some possible misconceptions:

"Young people are too immature for deciding!"

Isn't that what democracy is about? Are we focused on results and isn't the school a place for the process of democracy to happen and be learnt?

“Young people take too long to decide. They don’t know how to decide. Their decisions are not the best ones”

What is your focus? If it is to engage them, raising awareness on the democratic process and working out their responsibility, then YES, it takes time…but you will reach a distant place by giving time.

“It will never be possible to implement in such a big school!”

We don’t need to start by changing the whole school - it takes too much energy and we don’t see results in a short time. What if we start by a small action, something that is under our reach, like a selection of where the study visit is or who will be the classroom representative using sociocratic method?

“Some young people might fear expressing their opinion or nomination due to others judgements or conflicts”

Yes, sociocracy works for groups of young people that can freely express their opinion without harmful consequences on their relationships, but it doesn’t allow confidentiality which in some cases is important.

“Any teacher should be doing this method because it is more inclusive”

Yes, it can be more inclusive, but never force a teacher who is resistant to the process. The attitude of the facilitator (in this case, the teacher) is of major importance in the success of the implementation of this method. If the teacher is working on active listening, empathy and has conflict mediation skills (or willing to train it), then a step-by-step introduction to the method with students will be a positive experience.

Democracy is not an easy form of government, because it is never final; it is a living, changing organism, with a continuous shifting and adjusting of balance between individual freedom and general order.

–Ilka Chase

Resources

WebGraphy

https://www.sociocracy.info/the-sociocratic-election-process/

www.sociocracyforall.org

www.sociocracy30.org

www.sociocracy.info

www.thesociocracygroup.com

Resources

www.wonderingschool.org

www.schoolcirclesfilm.com

www.facebook.com/groups/sociocracyinschools

Disclaimer

The content of this publication is compiled with care and our best effort, but it is purely informational, we do not accept responsibility for mistakes and unintended inaccuracies.

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